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TRAJECTORIES OF STATE
FORMATION ACROSS
FIFTEENTH-CENTURY
ISLAMIC WEST-ASIA
EURASIAN PARALLELS, CONNECTIONS
AND DIVERGENCES

EDITED BY JO VAN STEENBERGEN

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Trajectories of State Formation across Fifteenth-Century Islamic West-Asia

Rulers & Elites

Comparative Studies in Governance

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Eurasian Parallels, Connections and Divergences

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Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi (d. 1454), *Zafar-namah* [Book of Conquest] (Baltimore or Garrett *Zafar-namah*) (manuscript on paper, text finished in 1467, miniature-paintings probably dating from the 1480s or 1490s), Garrett Library Manuscripts, Non-Circ, Gar. 3 c. 1, folios 82v–83r. The John Work Garrett Library, The Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University.

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Jo Van Steenbergen
Antwerp, 30 October 2019

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Contributors

Georg Christ

is Senior Lecturer and teaches Medieval and Early Modern History at the University of Manchester. Before he worked as a Research Group Leader at Universität Heidelberg, Germany (2008–2012) and for the UN as a military observer and staff officer (2006–2008). His research focuses on the late medieval eastern Mediterranean and Veneto-Mamluk relations. He currently prepares a monograph on Venetian and Mamluk naval and commercial policies in the 14th century.

Kristof D'hulster

is a postdoctoral associate of the Department of Languages and Cultures at Ghent University (Belgium); he was postdoctoral fellow of the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO) (2016–19), of the Special Research Fund (BOF) of Ghent University (2015–16) and on the ERC project “The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate” at Ghent University (2010–2014). He has a Ph.D. in Central-Asian Turkic linguistics. Working on processes of exchange and interaction within the Medieval Islamic world, he is currently engaged in Mamluk studies first and foremost, with a particular focus on the ethnic and linguistic dimensions to Mamluk identity. His articles have appeared in several international journals, including the *Journal of Arabic Literature*, the *Annales Islamologiques*, and *History Compass*. He has a forthcoming monograph (2020), *Browsing through the Sultan's Bookshelves. Towards a Reconstruction of the Library of the Mamluk Sultan Qānişawh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1516)*.

Jan Dumolyn

is Senior Lecturer in medieval history in the Department of History and the Henri Pirenne Institute for Medieval Studies at Ghent University. He has published widely on the social, political and cultural history of medieval Flanders and the Burgundian Netherlands, including, together with Andrew Brown and Peter Burke, *Medieval Bruges, c. 850-c. 1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Albrecht Fuess

is Professor of Islamic Studies at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS) at the Philipps-University Marburg. He specializes in the history of the Middle East (13th–16th centuries) and the contemporary Muslim presence in Europe. Among his recent publications is, together with Stefan Rohdewald and

Stephan Connerman: *Transottomanica: Osteuropäisch-osmanisch-persische Mobilitätsdynamiken. Perspektiven und Forschungsstand* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2019).

Dimitri J. Kastritsis

is Lecturer in Ottoman History at the University of St Andrews. His interests focus on the political, social and intellectual culture of the late medieval and early modern Mediterranean world. He is especially interested in historical texts and other narratives of the past. His publications include *The Sons of Bayezid* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) and *An Early Ottoman History: The Oxford Anonymous Chronicle* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

Beatrice Forbes Manz

is Professor of History at Tufts University. She has published two books, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), along with numerous articles on ideology, historiography and political practice in the Mongol and Timurid periods. She is currently finishing a survey history of nomads in the Middle East from the rise of Islam to the present for the Cambridge series, "Themes in Islamic History". The next research project planned is a study of the Mongol conquest of Iran.

John L. Meloy

is Professor of History in the Department of History and Archaeology at the American University of Beirut. His publications include: *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade: Mecca and Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: Center for Middle Eastern Studies/Middle East Documentation Center), re-issued in 2015 in a revised paperback edition; "Aggression in the Best of Lands': Mecca in Egyptian-Indian Diplomacy in the Ninth/Fifteenth Century", in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies*, ed. F. Bauden and M. Dekkiche (Leiden: Brill, 2019); and "Mecca Entangled", in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History*, ed. R. Amitai and S. Conermann (Bonn: Bonn University Press/V&R Unipress, 2019).

Jo Van Steenberghe

is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Department of Languages and Cultures and the Henri Pirenne Institute for Medieval Studies at Ghent University. His publications include *Order Out of Chaos. Patronage, Conflict, and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture. 741–784/1341–1382* (Brill, 2006); *Caliphate and Kingship in a Fifteenth-Century Literary History of Muslim Leadership and*

Pilgrimage (Brill, 2016); *A History of the Islamic World, 600–1800. Empire, Dynastic Formations, and Heterogeneities in Pre-Modern Islamic West-Asia* (Routledge, 2020); and chapters and articles on late medieval Syro-Egyptian social and cultural history. He is supervisor and principal investigator of several research projects and digital initiatives related to the history of late medieval Egypt and Syria.

Patrick Wing

is Associate Professor of History at the University of Redlands. His research considers questions of state formation, political ideology and economic change across the regions dominated by the Mongols and the Sultanate of Cairo in the late medieval period. His book, *The Jalayirids: Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Middle East*, was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2016. From 2010 to 2012 Wing was a post-doctoral researcher on the ERC project “The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate”, directed by Jo Van Steenberghe at Ghent University.

State Formation in the Fifteenth Century and the Western Eurasian Canvas: Problems and Opportunities

Jo Van Steenberghe

1 Whither Eurasian State Formation? Claims, Pitfalls and Opportunities*

The concept, practice, institution and appearance of ‘the state’ have been hotly debated ever since the emergence of history as a discipline within modern scholarship. Over the past century debates over states and statist systems, and around issues of their emergence and transformation throughout human history, have been substantially molded by the visions of towering figures such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and many others. At the same time, they have taken on many different guises along a wide variety of intellectual trajectories. Indeed, research on states and their formation and transformation, already a vast field, continues to expand rapidly. Approaches and concepts have been legion, bringing in more specific if rarely un-problematic analytical or descriptive forms and types, such as the ‘feudal state’, the ‘patrimonial state’, the ‘dynastic state’, the ‘bureaucratic state’ or the ‘(early) modern state’. The scholarly bibliography on these forms and types of state in various disciplines of the social sciences and humanities is obviously colossal. Any attempt to reconstruct these debates in the context of the introduction to this volume on state formation in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asian history therefore inevitably risks remaining at the most superficial level. Nevertheless, at this point we should probably emphasize two points related to these debates. These issues, outlined in the next paragraphs, offer grounds not just for the relevance of thinking carefully about state formation in any fifteenth-century

* This introduction has been finalized within the context of the project ‘The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate II: Historiography, Political Order and State Formation in Fifteenth-Century Egypt and Syria’ (UGent, 2017–21); this project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Consolidator Grant agreement No 681510). Thanks are due to my colleagues Jan Dumolyn and Frederik Buylaert for contributing to earlier versions of this introduction with most valuable comments and suggestions.

research context. As this volume will also argue, these two points also combine to make a strong case for the importance of pursuing more 'entangled' and connected historical as well as historiographical trajectories to conduct such inquiries.

First of all, for a variety of reasons—some obvious and some less so—the adoption and elaboration of different visions, concepts and types of states and state formations have arguably been largely dominated by Eurocentrist approaches. Indeed, certainly in the Enlightenment and Hegelian traditions which are at the origin of all modern debates on the 'state', Eurocentrism is not just a small embarrassing problem that new generations of scholars have to correct. Since the development of the humanities and social sciences from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onwards, Eurocentrist categories of analysis and Eurocentrist empirical research programs have been central to all theories on the origins of the 'state'—and indeed of 'modernity' itself. The 'state' is doubtless one of the key conceptual pillars of modernity, along with 'rationality', 'capitalism', 'freedom', 'division of labor' and other such master signifiers. Indeed, descriptions of the past, whether the European idea of the 'past as a foreign country' or the Orientalist imaginary of the 'Other's' history or lack thereof, have always been a way of talking about the present or about unfulfilled futures. In this respect the 'state' and its relationship to 'society' have always represented a central stake in the debate.

This presentist or even teleological and Western bias in the classical sociology of modernity has now almost universally been recognized. In fact, in recent decades there has been a noticeable increase in interest in the development of more specific tools and insights for the study of premodern and non-European polities and for gaining a better understanding of premodern and non-European 'statist' practices, institutions and discourses of power, distinction, integration, redistribution and order. Nevertheless—and this is the second important point for comparative purposes—, understandings of states and state systems tend to move at greatly differing speeds in different fields of historical research, and these fields themselves often employ extremely divergent epistemological and heuristic parameters. As such, our understandings of states and state systems generally continue to lack proper and nuanced awareness of recent research achievements and advances in cognate contexts, whether European or non-European. The concept of 'the state' is widely used in more or less theoretically informed ways across history. However, people working in different regional and chronological fields of specialization hardly ever understand the notion in similar ways, and the complex dynamics of this great divergence are often even less appreciated across such different research traditions. Dominant paradigms within these traditions may be influenced by

various diverging, or even incompatible, forms of social theory. This can complicate valid comparative research, especially when apparently similar categories of analysis—including the very notion of the ‘state’ itself—mean different things in different research traditions. This is particularly true when these different meanings are not explained explicitly, are only used in extremely fuzzy ways, or retain an imported, even exogenous or anachronistic, flavor to them.

This volume wishes to help build bridges between these multivalent conceptions of state formation, making links between different conceptions of how Eurasian practices, institutions and discourses of legitimate violence, resource redistribution, social differentiation, political integration and order have changed over time and across space. We work on the basis of the simple proposition that, despite the available, perhaps even conflicting, macro-narratives, this intellectual process of more ‘entangled’ trans-regional and trans-dynastic writing about history benefits most from starting bottom-up and considering relationships between the specific practices and interpretations of the different socio-cultural formations of the Eurasian zone. Furthermore, we work on the basis of the claim that the particularities and ‘entanglements’ of non-European rulers and elites require much more empirical and interpretive research to shift the balance away from Eurocentrist (or other-centrist) analytical perspectives, and toward more decentered considerations of diverse Eurasian trajectories of state formation. Here we actually encounter another, arguably even more fundamental, caveat that hampers the building of these interpretive bridges in meaningful, stable ways. Within the entire field of late medieval Eurasian political history there are huge differences in how many research traditions have dealt with the rich and often abundant variety of extant source material. Most relevant to consider for this volume and its focus on Western Eurasia is the disparity between the topics that have been studied (and restudied) on the basis of the relatively abundant sources for late medieval and early modern European history and the substantially more modest amount of cases that so far have been the object of any historical analysis for Islamic West-Asian history.¹ This disparity means that macro-analytical

¹ To illustrate this point, there still exist no simple narrative biographies for many, if not most, of the local and regional rulers and sultans of late medieval and early modern West-Asia. Moreover, most existing biographical studies of the last decades continue to be regarded as having a kind of pioneering and referential status, due to the absence of any other serious studies. Fifteenth-century cases in point are Babinger’s study of the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, published in 1959, Darrag’s study of the Egyptian sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay, published in 1961, Woods’ monograph on the Aqquyunlu Turkmen polity, first published in 1976 (and republished in an expanded edition in 1999), Petry’s two monographs on the reigns of the Egyptian sultans Qaytbay and Qansawh, published in 1993 and 1994, and Manz’ biography of the

approaches in early modern European history have far more solid empirical grounds than those of Islamic West-Asian history. In the past there have been serious attempts to transcend the specificity and peculiarity of European trajectories and develop more universal models. These certainly include Weber's 'Herrschaftslegitimität' and related ideal types, Marx's 'Mode of Production' and the superstructure or later Marxist reformulations and, more recently, Mann's 'power networks' or Bourdieu's '*capital étatique*'. However, these conceptualizations are all marked not just by a desire to integrate non-European experiences in their analyses, but they are also impeded by the fact that any understanding of the latter is derived from a rather limited number of studies.² Thus, the Eurocentrism mentioned above may also be seen as a function, not of some intentional form of orientalism, but of this uneven empirical situation.

2 Whither the Fifteenth Century: Islamic West-Asia's Trajectories of State Formation in Context

This volume aims to promote and enable more balanced and more connected interpretations in current understandings of premodern rulers and elites of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia.³ This vast space, stretching between the worlds of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean and between those of the Hindukush and the Sahara (see map 1), is considered here as representing a central and interrelated Eurasian political landscape. Furthermore, this West-Asian

central-Asian ruler Temür, published in 1999 (Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*; Darrag, *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay*; Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*; Petry, *Twilight of Majesty*; Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*; Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*).

- 2 A good example of this point is Bourdieu's "From the King's House to the Reason of State" (originally published in French in 1997)—aiming "to pinpoint the logic of the historical process which governed the crystallization of this historical reality that is the state", and "to construct a *model* of this process". In this work, for non-European history, Bourdieu limited himself to referring to Muzaffar Alam's *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1708–1748* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), to Robert Mantran's *L'Histoire de l'empire ottoman* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), and to Pierre-Etienne Will's "Bureaucratie officielle et bureaucratie réelle. Sur quelques dilemmes de l'administration impériale à l'époque des Qing", *Études chinoises* 8/1 (1989): 69–141, which is extremely limited in comparison to the list of more than thirty books and articles on late medieval and early modern European history.
- 3 For the historiographical background, challenges and relationships of comparative, connected and 'entangled' history, see Duindam, "Rulers and Elites in Global History: Introductory Observations", pp. 7–18; Conermann, "The Mamluk Empire", pp. 22–25 ("Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the study of spaces of interaction"); Werner & Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison".

landscape, itself the object of different research traditions, is considered as in need of far more detailed and ‘entangled’ approaches, especially for the fifteenth century. This introduction therefore does not only wish to make a case for the relevance and importance of our choice to focus on ‘the state’ and on Islamic West-Asia. In addition, we also wish to account here for this volume’s claim that Islamic West-Asian state formation in the fifteenth century represents a coherent subject of study.

In recent decades, interest in the fifteenth century has been gaining momentum in at least some generalizing and globalizing approaches to history writing. A case in point is the impressive volume *‘l’Histoire du monde au xv^e siècle’*, first published in 2009 and directed by Patrick Boucheron, professor of the “Histories of Power in Western Europe, 13th–16th centuries” (*Histoire des pouvoirs en Europe occidentale, XIII^e–XVI^e siècle*) at the Collège de France. Boucheron and his team framed the fifteenth century as moving from a Eurasian to a global scale of integration, “from Tamerlane to Magellan”, and identified the period not just as the “age of the world’s opening up and accomplishment”, but also as “an aggregation of a rich variety of experiments and potentialities”.⁴ Historiographical traditions continue to develop for at least some of these experiments and potentialities albeit in diverse ways. In the Western Eurasian context, this high appreciation of the intrinsic value of studying the fifteenth century is illustrated by the vitality of late medieval and early modern European history writing as well as the relatively intensely studied field of Syro-Egyptian ‘Mamluk’ history.⁵ A similar momentum is arguably picking up in other fields of Western Eurasian history, such as those defined by early Ottoman, Timurid and other fifteenth-century dynasties.⁶

Despite this momentum within particular research traditions, however, most textbooks and general works on West-Asian, Eurasian and world history have not yet followed suit. Even more recent comparative works of (political) history that try to pursue more globalizing diachronic approaches seem to face

4 Boucheron, “Introduction. Les boucles du monde: contours du xv^e siècle”, p. 23 (“Le xv^e siècle, âge d’ouverture et d’accomplissement du monde? Sans doute, mais qui ménage également une somme profuse d’expériences et de devenirs possible”; “De Tamerlan à Magellan? Contours du xv^e siècle”).

5 For more or less comprehensive overviews of these fields of political history, see Watts, *The Making of Politics*; Van Steenberg, Wing, and D’hulster, “The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate?”.

6 See recent publications such as Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*; Kastritsis, *An Early Ottoman History*; Asutay-Effenberger and Rehm, *Sultan Mehmet II*; and also, for ‘European’ history beyond traditional notions of the Latin Christian West: Nowakowska, *Remembering the Jagiellonians*.

a lack of good data, or of easy ways into those data and their interpretations. Too often this “age of the world’s opening up and accomplishment” continues to be narrowed down to one or more specific (and specifically remembered) events such as the “fall” of Constantinople in 1453, the end of the “Hundred Years’ War”, the “discovery” of a New World in 1492, or the “re-conquest” of Granada. These events tend to be seen as marking some well-defined moment of new, early modern beginnings, as though starting from a clean slate. In general, such works of history, along with the widely shared historical imaginations that they represent, continue to situate themselves comfortably in the stretched world-historical paradigm of a fourteenth-century collapse of the Mongol Eurasian order, and of post-Mongol transitions to the (apparently) more stable and therefore more interesting appearances of early modern states and empires.⁷ They tend to reduce fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia either to a space in which only the Ottoman imperial formation, with its expanding European presence, really mattered, or to a preparatory stage for the rise of the Islamic world’s so-called ‘Gunpowder Empires’ more in general.⁸ There thus remains a mismatch between these general and generalizing imaginations and the diverse historiographical traditions that have developed around particular fifteenth-century “experiments and potentialities”. In fact, these traditions are increasingly exposing the notion of Asia’s early modern ‘Gunpowder Empires’ as a misnomer, which may offer a useful perspective to understand the Ottoman case, but not those of its early modern peers.⁹ Surely it is time to raise awareness of the many similar *pars-pro-toto* assumptions that continue to reduce appreciations of Islamic West-Asia’s fifteenth-century history to equally unhelpful generalizations.

As Boucheron’s summarizing phrase “from Tamerlane to Magellan” implies, in many ways a central figure in these “experiments and potentialities” was the Central-Asian Turko-Mongol ruler Temür, or Tamerlane in European parlance.¹⁰ Temür passed away after a brief illness in the Central-Asian town of

7 See Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, and the organization along this paradigm of Darwin, *After Tamerlane*. See for instance also Egger’s discussion of fifteenth-century Syro-Egyptian political history, reduced to the simple phrase that “[t]he Circassians dominated Egypt for the next 135 years, until their defeat at the hands of the Ottomans in 1517”. (Egger, *A History of the Muslim World to 1750*, p. 296).

8 See Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*; Reinhard, *Empires and Encounters*. This point is also made in Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, pp. 290–291.

9 Reinhard, *Empires and Encounters*, pp. 28–29.

10 See also Darwin, *After Tamerlane*; and Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories”, pp. 736–740, where he identifies “the reformulation of Eurasian politics in the context of the great

Otrar in February 1405, on his way to attack and conquer Ming China. Temür died in somewhat anticlimactic circumstances, bedridden rather than on horseback, as might have befitted a long life of local, regional and trans-regional Eurasian empowerment. Temür had a remarkable career indeed, characterized by conquest, plunder and fearsome havoc, but also by accommodation, efflorescence and successful state formation. His accomplishments left a defining mark on the diverse social, cultural, economic and political landscapes of Central-, South- and West-Asia and of Eastern Europe, like that of few individuals either before or after. Throughout these regions, from Samarkand in Transoxiana to Herat in Khurasan, from Delhi in northern India to Cairo in Egypt, and from Muscovy in the North to Hormuz in the South, thanks to Temür's politics of power and conquest, balances of power were recalibrated, social groups and communities were reconfigured, connections were reformed, and elites were redefined.¹¹ Many new contingencies, setbacks and opportunities arose from this remarkable, even revolutionary moment of intense Eurasian connectivity at the turn of the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. In complex ways many of these changes fed directly or indirectly into the multiple conflicting, overlapping and complementing power relations that, about a century later, crystallized into the early-modern Eurasian imperial formations of Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals and Uzbeks. How that happened is the story of Turko-Mongol rulers and elites, of Muslim political communities, and of various interrelated trajectories of post-Temür state formation in fifteenth-century Western Eurasia.

enterprise of Amir Timur Gurgan (d. 1405) [...] as the convenient, obviously symbolic, point of departure" He offers here a highly nuanced but yet again typical imagination of the fifteenth century as a mere beginning of (or transition to) the early modern "age of geographical redefinition", of "a heightening of the long-term structural conflict that resulted in relations between settled agricultural societies on the one hand, and nomadic groups [...] on the other", of "changes in political theology", and of "new or intensified forms of hierarchy, domination and separation".

- 11 See Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*. This Timurid factor, and its different Turko-Mongol legacies, rebooted leadership formations from Cairo to Samarkand and from Edirne to Herat, but not in the Maghreb, al-Andalus or Yemen. This is an important reason for not explicitly including these and other complex and fundamentally different Islamic political landscapes within discussions in this volume. The Eurasian steppes between the Black Sea and the Aral sea, dominated since the thirteenth century by the Muslim leaders of the Mongol Golden Horde, represent another very different landscape that is not included here, not least because "the Golden Horde was not able to recover from Timur's onslaught [...] [b]y the fifteenth century, only the steppe remained, and even it was threatened from the east by a cluster of Mongol-Turkic clans from Siberia [...] [and t]he breakup of the Golden Horde coincided with the rise of Muscovy". (Egger, *A History of the Muslim World to 1750*, pp. 384–385).

The European 'Far West'¹² was not at all similarly affected by the changes that were generated by Temür's Eurasian campaigns. Western Europe very much followed its own fifteenth-century dynamics of local and regional political change and transformation. In many ways these developments were as distinct within the wider Eurasian world as their cultural umbrella of Latin Christianity was from the Turko-Mongol Muslim identities that dominated politics in West-Asia. Nevertheless, at the turn of the sixteenth century, in Europe too diverse local and regional power relations were crystallizing into a handful of early-modern states and empires. Even though the roots of this process stretch back way beyond the beginning of the fifteenth century, that era certainly also witnessed dynamics of political formation that were highly significant at the eve of early modernity. Over time those European dynamics moreover became more consistently connected than ever before to what happened in Islamic West-Asia. One crucial factor for the growth of this Western Eurasian connectivity in the fifteenth century was the continuation and intensification of resource flows across the Mediterranean, not least in the context of the booming Indo-Mediterranean spice trade. Another factor was the continued westward expansion of the Ottoman Sultanate in the Balkans, in Hungary and in the Eastern Mediterranean, which had a substantial impact on European political imaginations, worldviews and interests. In fact, the latter fact seems to have made the Islamic 'East'—in whatever 'othering' way it was imagined or encountered—more present than ever before at the courts and headquarters of European princes and statesmen.¹³

This intensifying political entanglement of various European and West-Asian elites during the fifteenth century is well illustrated by the famous case of the Ottoman prince Jem Sultan (d. 1495). After his defeat in the Ottoman succession struggle of 1481, Jem sought and found a welcome refuge from the wrath of his victorious brother, sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), in various places. The

¹² For the notion of a "European Far West", see Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, p. 17.

¹³ This understanding of the upsurge of this particular Eurasian connectivity in the fifteenth century builds, on the one hand, upon Abu Lughod's famous thirteenth-century Afro-Eurasian economic "world system" and her idea of its unravelling, from the second half of the fourteenth century onwards, both as a result of the Black Death pandemic and the disintegration of the Mongol empire. On the other hand, it also builds in eclectic ways upon, amongst others, Braudel's notion of a "long sixteenth century", which for him began in the fifteenth century, Darwin's conception of "the death of Tamerlane [as] a turning point in world history" and Reinhard's assumption that from the turn of the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries onwards "there was a gradual increase in the frequency of various interactions within and between cultural areas—a highly plausible thesis though not definitely provable" (Braudel, *La méditerranée*; Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*; Reinhard, *Empires and Encounters*, esp. p. 8).

first to welcome him at court was the sultan of Cairo, al-Ashraf Qaytbay (r. 1468–96). Jem then fled to the Knights Hospitallers in Rhodes, who brought him to France. Finally, he ended up in Italy, first with the Pope in Rome, and eventually with the King of France, Charles VIII (r. 1483–1498), in Naples. Throughout his adventures, Jem's hosts, supporters and enemies in East and West appear to have been highly interconnected in that they had similar ways of politicizing his symbolic value as a legitimate pretender to the Ottoman throne, and hence as a potential threat to Bayezid's authority and as an effective check on Ottoman territorial expansionism, especially in Eastern Anatolia, Hungary and the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁴ Although this shared understanding and appreciation of Ottoman political culture may have been quite unique and exceptional, the point here is that by the 1480s and 1490s a case like Jem's had gained unprecedented importance to quite a few of Europe's and West-Asia's rulers. Jem's adventures therefore demonstrate that at least some European ruling elites were increasingly being drawn into an expanding political space of Western Eurasian dimensions. In the sixteenth century, this gradual emergence of a novel space of political interaction culminated in the scramble for influence, control and global political order that resulted in many of the great powers of the Early Modern East and West. However, the oft-neglected early stage of this process of contested global integration is the post-Temür fifteenth century, which was marked both by the endless competition for resources and sovereignty among local and regional rulers and by new sets of players who were acquiring new levels of agency and increasing political significance on a Western Eurasian platform.

Central to this volume are these complex phenomena of competition and empowerment, of power elites and political communities, and of varying trajectories of state formation across fifteenth-century Western Eurasia, and in particular in the Nile-to-Oxus and Bosphorus-to-Indus complex of what is defined here as Islamic West-Asia. These phenomena relate to particular historical stories of political experimentation and accommodation as well as fragmentation and conquest. They also pertain to a wide-ranging legacy of historiographical stories which are either inspiring analytically or which hold more direct descriptive value. Qualifications like these are of course largely valid for any construct of time and space, and one must also acknowledge that some conscious interpretive framing is involved in the singling out of histories of power and claiming some form of connectivity for them, particularly when these histories are as diverse and varied as those of fifteenth-century CE Latin Christian Europe and of ninth-century AH Islamic West-Asia. Nevertheless,

14 Vatin, *Sultan Djem*; Hattox, "Qaytbay's Diplomatic Dilemma".

among the many paths of political transformation present during this broadly defined time and space, some clearly proved more attuned than others to local and globalizing circumstances on the threshold of the formation of early modern states and empires, in the European ‘Far West’ as much as elsewhere. These many winding roads, dead-end streets and expanding routes of history are more intertwined than might be expected. Indeed, the stories leading up to Temür’s death in Otrar at the beginning of the century after a long career of Eurasian conquest, and the developments leading to Jem Sultan’s death in Naples nine decades later after being held hostage to the French king, the Pope and the Knights Hospitallers can be seen as meaningful instances in ongoing processes of political entanglement and competition for resources and sovereignty on a Eurasian scale.

However, one must admit that it can also be problematic to connect ‘Tamerlane to Magellan’ and Temür’s Chagatai Transoxiana to Jem Sultan’s Renaissance Europe in such a straightforward way. This may easily appear as yet another form of the above-mentioned reductionist, over-generalizing or Eurocentric readings. This is certainly not the approach that this volume wishes to promote. As suggested before, we do not regard the history of the fifteenth century as a mere prelude to early modernity. In the European ‘Far West’ as well as in Islamic West-Asia, many roads were taken, and even more not taken, by rulers and elites of all kinds and these did not necessarily progress to early modern centralizations. Historically, the trajectories that did not transform into early modern political formations—from the Duchy of Burgundy to the so-called Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo—are as meaningful as those that did survive the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries. In fact, historians should pay attention to the former for many more reasons other than just their disappearance. These finite trajectories are equally relevant if only because they are not burdened by any teleological impressions of fulfilling imperial destinies or of progressing towards Early Modernity.

This volume and its contributions actually originate from a collaborative research project on fifteenth-century state formation in the Sultanate of Cairo. They have emerged in particular from this project’s concluding conference, which promoted a comparative approach to the question of fifteenth-century state formation.¹⁵ In line with this approach, this volume takes up the specific

15 ‘The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate: Political Traditions and State Formation in fifteenth century Egypt and Syria’ (ERC Starting Grant, 2009–14, UGent, PI Jo Van Steenbergen); International Conference “Whither the Early Modern State? Fifteenth-Century State Formation across Eurasia. Connections, Divergences and Comparisons” (Ghent, 10–12 September 2014) (organizers Jo Van Steenbergen, Malika Dekkiche, Kristof D’hulster; participants: Lisa Balabanlilar, Michele Bernardini, Wim Blockmans, Marc

challenge to demonstrate that the political organization of the Sultanate in fifteenth-century Egypt and Syria around the alleged priority of military slaves (*mamlūks*) is less particular or unique than is so often assumed, and that this organization is much better considered as a fully integrated part of the larger context of West-Asian appearances and negotiations of political order and social power. This Sultanate's state was grounded in century-old West- and Inner Asian traditions and practices. Throughout the later medieval period it continued to pulsate as a formidable regional power from Cairo, one of the late medieval world's largest and most vibrant urban hubs, home to up to a quarter of a million inhabitants and well connected globally via myriads of interlocking political, commercial and cultural networks and resource flows. Moreover, in the fifteenth century this Sultanate appeared more than ever in the format of a non-dynastic state from the practices of a diverse range of military, legal, scribal and financial specialists and entrepreneurs, the military, commercial and agricultural resources that they managed, the Sunni Islamic value system that they nurtured and reproduced, and the structuring stratagems of a long-standing bureaucratic and ideological apparatus with which they operated. According to at least one modern scholar, extensive archival research has suggested that the rise of new social groups and new structures of landholding in fifteenth-century Egypt and Syria, along with the larger socio-economic and cultural transformations which caused them, were tantamount to paradigm-shifting changes that would have generated Egypt's own form of 'modernization' were it not for the Ottoman conquest of 1517.¹⁶ One contribution to the above-mentioned *'Histoire du monde au xv^e siècle'* indeed even claimed more generally for the wider West-Asian landscape that "from Central-Asia to Egypt the fifteenth century appears as a moment of modernization of the Islamic state, mostly however without being completed or coming too late to avoid the attrition of central authority".¹⁷

Boone, Stephan Conermann, Georg Christ, Yasser Daoudi, Malika Dekkiche, Kristof D'hulster, Jan Dumolyn, Suraiya Faroqhi, Roy Fischel, Antje Flüchter, Albrecht Fuess, Jean-Philippe Genet, Jane Hathaway, Stephen Humphreys, Dimitri Kastritsis, Metin Kunt, Beatrice Manz, Christopher Markiewicz, John Meloy, Coline Mitchell, Stéphane Péquignot, Carl Petry, David Robinson, Vasileios Syros, Peer Vries, John Watts, Patrick Wing, André Wink, Koby Yosef).

16 Abū Ghāzī, *al-Juzur al-tārikhiyya*; see also idem, *Tatawwur al-Ḥiyāza al-Zirā'īya*. For a review and constructive critique, see Sabra, "The Rise of a New Class?".

17 Loiseau, "Le siècle turc", p. 49: "De l'Asie centrale à l'Égypte, le xv^e siècle est bien un temps de modernisation de l'État islamique, le plus souvent inachevée ou trop tard menée pour éviter l'épuisement de l'autorité centrale".

These remarkable interpretations of failed Syro-Egyptian or even West-Asian trajectories of modernization represent a kind of counterfactual and negative history that will not be pursued at all in this volume. As suggested before, we do not wish to regard the history of the fifteenth century as a mere prelude to early modern successes or failures. Nevertheless, readings such as these certainly confirm both the relatedness of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia's different post-Temür leadership configurations and the relevance of approaching the Cairo Sultanate as another West-Asian trajectory of pre-modern state formation. In fact, this volume will claim that adopting this entangled and trans-dynastic approach enables new understandings of the complexity of the Sultanate's fifteenth-century formation and enriches the ways in which Ottoman as well as other West-Asian trajectories can also be explored. This hopefully invites a better-informed integration of this central Eurasian landscape, even in any future considerations of fifteenth-century state formation in general.

3 **Whither This Volume: Bringing Islamic West-Asia's Trajectories of State Formation into Focus**

After explaining why and how fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asian state formation makes for a relevant and consistent subject, in this last section this introduction will also account in more detail for this volume's organization. This volume is constructed around extensively contextualized case studies pertaining to the Cairo Sultanate's as well as to Ottoman and Timurid-Turkmen trajectories of state formation. Undoubtedly various caveats are necessary when considering this construction around region-specific case-studies. These concern in particular the massive amount of material and cases that cannot be dealt with here, which may lead to new *pars-pro-toto* arguments. However, this caveat should not invalidate the fact that a consciously historicized and contextualized focus on high-end political dynamics of state formation in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia generates insights from which there is still much to learn. This is especially due to the fact that, by definition, centralizing power formations have always left a substantial mark on both state and non-state historical realities, in political as much as in economic, social and cultural terms. The different cases that are presented in this volume certainly attest to that. They contribute substantially to current understandings of various trajectories of state formation that were pursued, or experienced, by various post-Temür power elites in political centers such as Constantinople, Edirne, Cairo, Tabriz, Herat and Samarkand. These cases also point to the wider social, cultural and economic impact of those trajectories across and beyond Islamic West-Asia,

and they complement this deepening of various trajectories' understandings with valuable discussions of the diverse and challenging sources on which any scholarly engagement with those trajectories is based.

Furthermore, rather than presenting these cases simply in the splendid isolation of their specific contexts and academic idioms, this book pursues the projection of these cases onto a broad canvas of old, new and competing paradigms of state formation. This volume actually presents a first-of-its-kind entangled and trans-dynastic consideration of power, politics and state formation across fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia's diverse but at the same time highly interconnected power elites. This is achieved by the joint presentation of different case studies, but above all by offering extensive historical and historiographical context for these cases. This takes the form of a general historical introduction that offers empirical counter-arguments for any reductive assumptions, and formulates an interpretative call to overcome traditional dynastic boundaries and consider more carefully different experiences of widely shared political realities. This should add to growing insights into the artificial nature of the disciplinary (and linguistic) boundaries that continue to separate early Ottoman, Timurid-Turkmen and Mamluk historiographies. As such, this volume invites historians of West-Asian realities to rethink what they know about their subject within the underexplored wider framework of Western Eurasian state formation studies. For this reason, we also engage with the hotly debated subject of state formation in the late medieval Latin Christian West of Eurasia. This materializes in a detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks that have informed the study of the state in fifteenth-century research. This joint reconstruction of highly idiosyncratic European and West-Asian trajectories of state studies aims to put all the relevant conceptual cards on the table, so to speak, in order to enable more balanced, reflexive and de-centered future interactions between and beyond the different traditions of research on Islamic West-Asia. In these ways, this volume wishes to stimulate wider audiences and to open up a wider debate over interpretive engagements with specific West-Asian cases and with the specific historical, historiographical and empirical contexts that continue to define these cases' appearances on the brink of the rise of early modern Western Eurasian states and empires.

This volume consists of three complementary parts. The first part consists of two introductory chapters that evoke in critical and entangled ways theories, conceptualizations and current understandings of state formation in different research traditions that are particularly relevant for fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. The first chapter actually presents a new introductory interpretation of the entanglement and particularities of the power

elites, the institutions and practices, and the transformations that, since the days of Temür, left their marks on the rough political landscapes of Islamic West-Asia. Emphasizing the segmented nature of Turko-Mongol politics and socio-economic organization, this chapter describes ongoing dynamics of expansion, fragmentation and circulation, and recurrent attempts at Ottoman, Turko-‘Mamluk’, Timurid and Turkmen political stabilization and administrative penetration. It also argues that widely used binaries, such as those of ‘Turks’ and ‘Tajiks’, ‘elites’ (*khāṣṣa*) and ‘commoners’ (*‘amma*), or commanders and administrators, fed into claims and explanations that contributed to the many appearances of social order across West-Asia, amidst highly complex Ottoman, Timurid, Turkmen and Syro-Egyptian realities of segmentation, competitive empowerment and state formation.

The second chapter takes this further with a theoretical contextualization that reconstructs the modern study of fifteenth-century rulers and states in each of the dynastic research traditions of Islamic West-Asia. This is pitched against a wider background of state studies that includes discussions of trends in the modern historiography of late medieval Europe as well as of the entanglements and particularities of those West-Asian research traditions. In general, this chapter offers a more explicit understanding of how research into the fifteenth-century state has diverged over the years, not only in reference to Latin Christian Europe and Islamic West-Asia in general, but also for many of the different dynastic and proto-nationalist constituents of each. It argues at the same time that this divergence also harbors within itself many opportunities for an enriching exchange of ideas, given that searching for shared conceptual tools is not just about identifying parallels and connections, but rather more about comprehending divergence from a shared model. The chapter ends by suggesting that such a model may well be found in a very practical approach and may be usefully constructed around the recurrent suggestions that states do not make history, but history makes states, as and when successful social practices of exclusion, integration, reproduction and appropriation start appearing, and presenting themselves, pertaining to a coherent apparatus of coercion, distinction, differentiation and hegemony, or to the central state.

The seven case studies in the subsequent two parts of this volume refer to the different political contexts of Islamic West-Asia, with a particular focus on the oft-neglected Syro-Egyptian Sultanate of Cairo, and to particular examples of just how history (and historiography) makes states. The common thread running through them all concerns the nature of the relationships between various elite groups, institutions and discourses (and their renderings in different sets of contemporary sources) on the one hand and rapidly transforming power centers in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia on the other. These processes of

inclusion in, structuration of, or confrontation with the disposition of central or local power elites may have taken on various forms, depending on where and when these centripetal and centrifugal relationships manifested themselves. Everywhere, however, these processes revolved around the experimentation with and accommodation of power balances that gave shape to dynamic political orders. These orders were real, imagined or both, and always featured the distinctive, constitutive characteristic of having explicit links with a legitimate, transcendent form of central political authority, embodied in a particular ruler (or set of rulers), his (or their) court, and his (or their) representatives. Furthermore, these processes of inclusion, structuration and confrontation involve social relationships that did not just connect central and local elites, but actually constituted different social groups, or entangled networks, as central and peripheral elites, in potentially overlapping and conflicting ways. These 'centering' processes are considered here as representing interlocking thematic avenues within the wider field of the study of fifteenth-century West-Asian, and even Western Eurasian, state formations and transformations that enable us to consider and draw together the specific cases presented in this volume. More specifically, these processes are represented here as manifesting themselves with parallel but distinct 'centering' effects among central power elites in Cairo, Bursa and Constantinople (Part 2) and among local military, cultural and commercial elites in Iran, the Hijaz, Syria and the eastern Mediterranean (Part 3).

Part 2 considers the constitution of some of West-Asia's main centers of power in the fifteenth century. It opens with a case study of institutionalization from the so-called Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo, in Kristof D'hulster's 'The Road to the Citadel as a Chain of Opportunity'. In this chapter D'hulster looks into the upper end of courtly careers in fifteenth-century Cairo from the perspective of a bureaucratic *cursus honorum*, and reconsiders the sequential nature of the relationship between the *atabakiyya* ('chief military commandership') and the sultanate. By using the format of a critical and reflexive engagement with both fifteenth-century and modern historiographies on the subject, he explains that this institutional relationship was transformed as part of a state formation process that may be usefully identified as 'Mamlukization'. He suggests that such a structuration of what constituted the Sultanate's center and also its path dependencies deserve to be taken more into account in any historical interpretation. Chapter 4, by Albrecht Fuess, is entitled 'The Syro-Egyptian Sultanate in Transformation, 1496–1498'. Here, Fuess engages with a very similar problematic of accession to the sultanate in Cairo. He describes how by the end of the fifteenth century al-Nasir Muhammad b. Qaytbay (r. 1496–8) was attempting to reverse this process of 'Mamlukization' and he demonstrates how this sultan, as a royal son and heir, tried to reconnect with older, dynastic

traditions rather than the bureaucratic ones in order to bolster his claims to central authority and to counter the ambitions of veteran *mamlūk* grandees from his deceased father's entourage. Fuess also details how this particular moment of experimentation and accommodation was shaped by a cultural as well as a social program of substantial central reform, provoking harsh reactions, as can even be detected in the era's historiographical record. The experiment ultimately failed when this program's dynastic cornerstone of family rule proved too fickle. Chapter 5 by Dimitri Kastritsis, entitled 'Interpreting Early Ottoman Narratives of State Centralization', delves deeper into the social tensions that were evoked by processes of institutionalization and centralization, moving the focus to the early fifteenth-century context of Ottoman restoration and empowerment. Kastritsis engages in substantial historiographical detail with the case of the Çandarlı family, whose various members appeared as key agents of the expansion and organization of Ottoman power between the mid-fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries. At the same time, these figures appeared in contemporary and later narratives as corrupters of that centralizing power. The chapter presents a strong argument for considering the construction of these narratives not simply in a traditional context of reactions to post-1453 state centralization from increasingly marginalized peripheral elites, but in the post-Temür context of early fifteenth-century Ottoman fragmentation, competition between different Ottoman power centers and their opposing political discourses of Ottoman state formation and its trajectory, and the messy re-centering of Ottoman power around Mehmed I (r. 1412–21) and his entourage.

Part 3 discusses the constitution and accommodation of various local elites at the peripheries of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia's power centers. It opens with Beatrice Manz' 'Iranian Elites under the Timurids'. This chapter presents a revisionist discussion of the long history of Iranian landed elites, and explores their multivalent participation in local and regional politics in Timurid times. The chapter also calls for a more critical reading of the centering narratives of the available sources and their neglect or mere partial representation of non-central elites. Above all, Manz demonstrates here how beyond the Timurid courts and urban centers different processes of inclusion, structuration and confrontation were at work. This happened in centralizing and decentralizing ways that varied depending on time, place, actors and stakes, but always involved Iranian local elite families in far more active and connected ways and in far more meaningful military capacities than is generally assumed. Chapter 7, by John Meloy, is entitled 'the Judges of Mecca and Mamluk Hegemony', and it takes a similar *long durée* perspective to better

understand the changing relationships between local religious elites in the Hijaz and the Sultanate's court in Cairo. The particular processes of inclusion, structuration and confrontation at work here again reveal how they are multi-directional and multivalent ones, involving centering strategies and agencies as much as the pursuance of local interests and connections. Meloy argues that Cairo's penetration and integration of Hijazi politics through the appointment of local judges over time represented a type of Mamlukization that was shaped by ideological as well as by coercive and bureaucratic strategies. He shows how this had constitutive effects on all participants. These may be better understood through the concept of 'legibility': the Sultanate's state acquiring the ability to understand, or 'read' the social landscape of the Hijaz in ways that allowed it to participate, co-opt local elites, and contribute to shaping that landscape. Chapter 8, by Patrick Wing, entitled 'The Syrian Commercial Elite and Mamluk State-Building in the Fifteenth Century' shifts the focus to similar processes of experimentation, accommodation and co-optation at play amongst the newly emerging commercial elites in fifteenth-century Damascus. This chapter uses the case of the Banu Muzalliq family of merchants to explain how Cairo established new forms of control over the changing socio-economic landscapes of fifteenth-century Syria. Wing explains in particular how here too different processes of inclusion, structuration and confrontation were at work with varying effects on the constitution of the Sultanate's center and its relationships with local elites in Syria. The chapter also argues that those changing relationships of commercial, political and bureaucratic agencies need to be interpreted against a de-centered, entangled and regional canvas, allowing us to see these multiple ties as cosmopolitan and part of networks that connected Tabriz to Cairo and Venice to Mecca, rather than as merely Cairo-centric. The final chapter, by Georg Christ, entitled '*Cortesia, Zemechia* and Venetian Fiscality in Fifteenth-century Alexandria', continues this cosmopolitan and commercial perspective by engaging in more detail with that Venetian connection, and its effect on the constitution of the Sultanate's center. Christ moves the discussion back to Egypt, and moreover brings in a different set of sources from Venetian archives. These offer highly complementary new insights into those same processes of inclusion, structuration and confrontation that constituted the Sultanate's peripheries, its center in Cairo, and its wider, regional connections. The chapter reconstructs in detail how the locally negotiated solution of a customs conflict in Alexandria in 1419 between the Sultan's agents and the Venetian community was unsuccessfully contested by the latter at the Sultan's court in Cairo. This chapter also considers this case against the wider backdrop of Venetian commercial involvement in the Sultanate's political economy

from the thirteenth century onwards, and within an interpretive framework of hybrid relations that are constructed creatively and locally and at the same time bound by trans-local arrangements. Christ concludes that Venice was integrated in multiple, complex and highly illustrative ways in the Sultanate's constellation of power, with constitutive effects for both Cairo's court and Alexandria's diverse elites.

To conclude, through these seven specimens of specific West-Asian studies in Parts 2 and 3 and their detailed empirical and theoretical contextualizations and interpretations in Part 1, this volume offers new and arguably better tools—including survey chapters, interpretive frameworks and illustrative cases—for building the aforementioned bridges, for a more meaningful integration of Islamic West-Asia's rulers and elites in the writing of fifteenth-century Eurasian histories. At the very least, it is hoped that this volume will contribute to creating new opportunities for future research to develop more informed, more connected and more valid comparative reflections on the meanings and potentials that emerge from these and many other micro-studies into various manifestations of fifteenth-century West-Asian, and Eurasian, state formation.

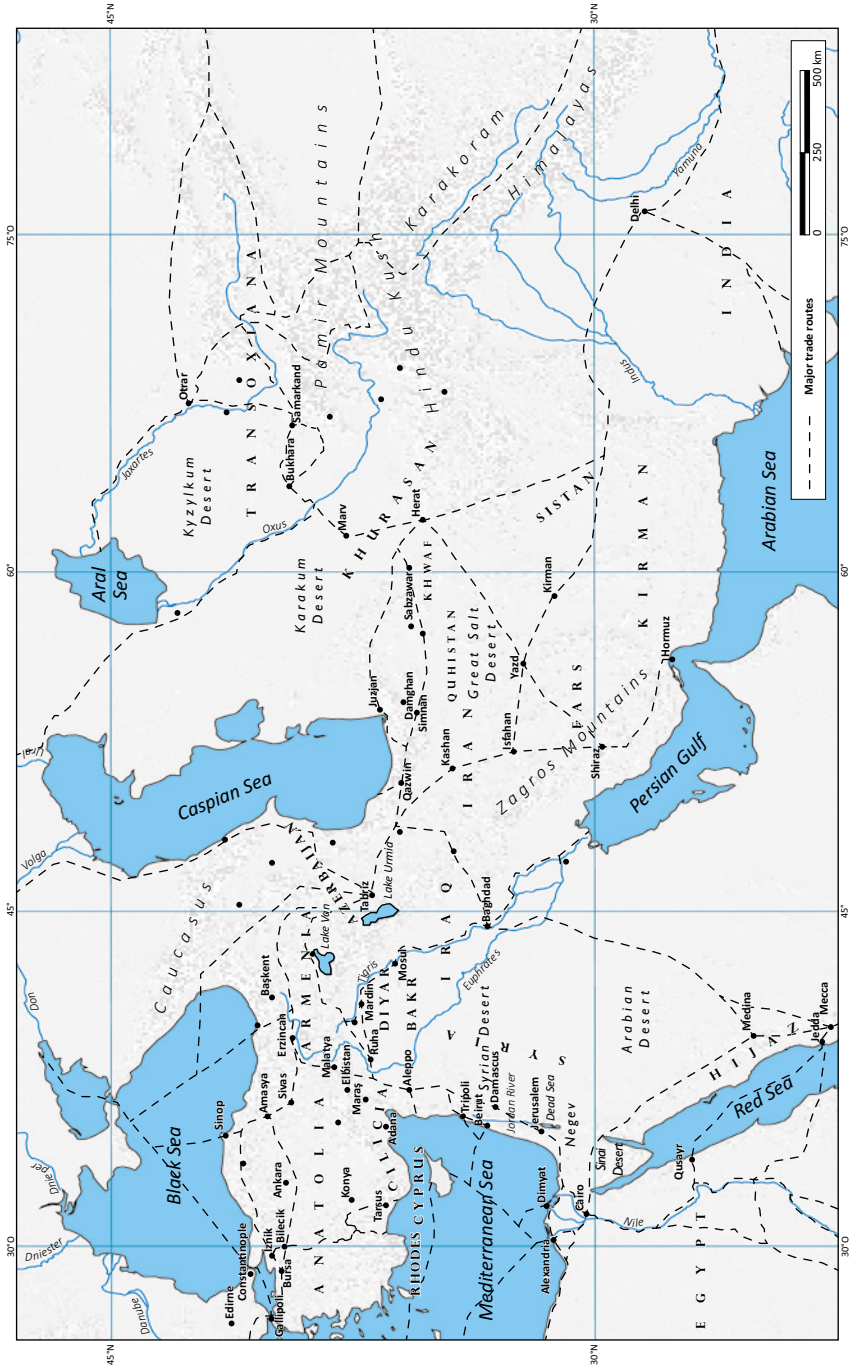
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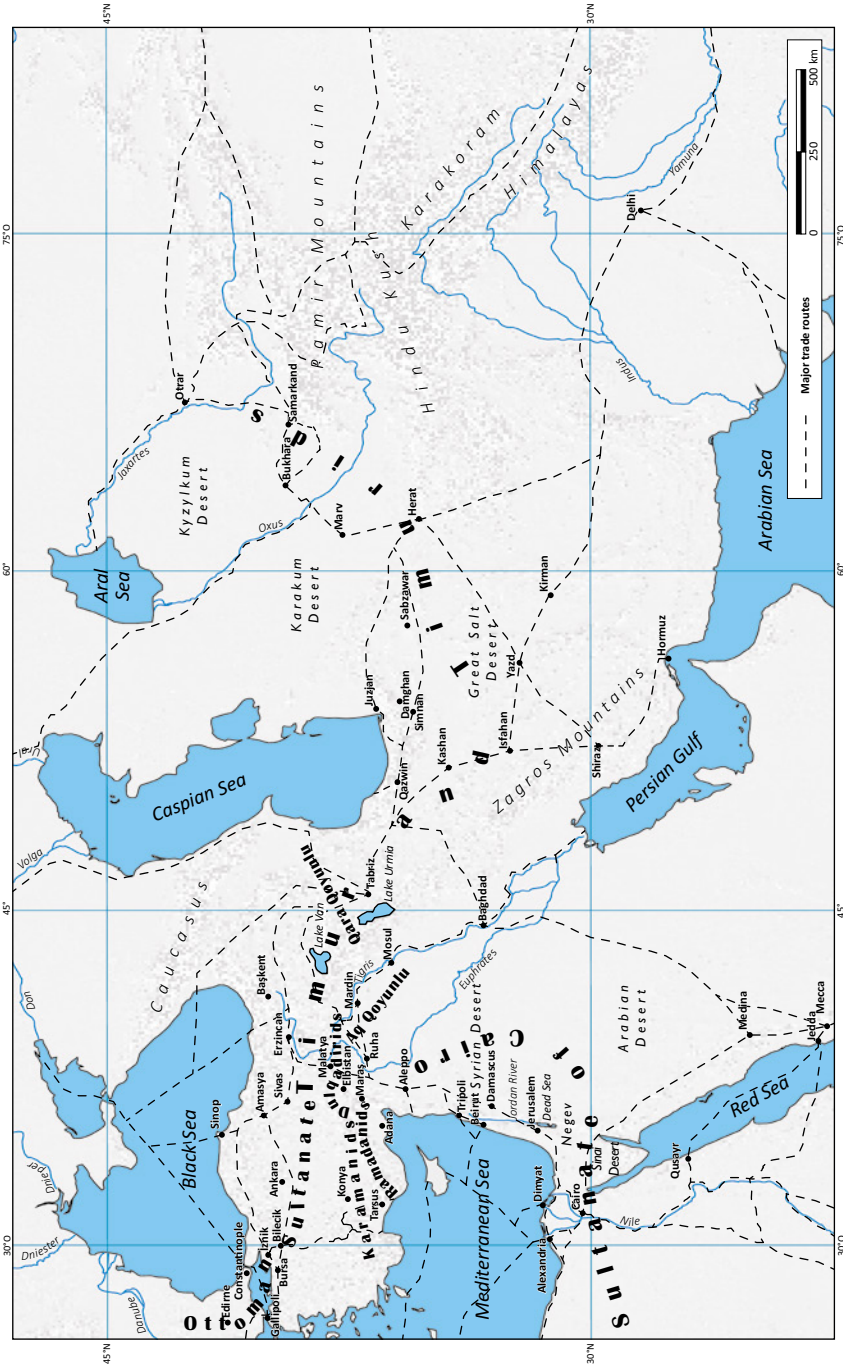
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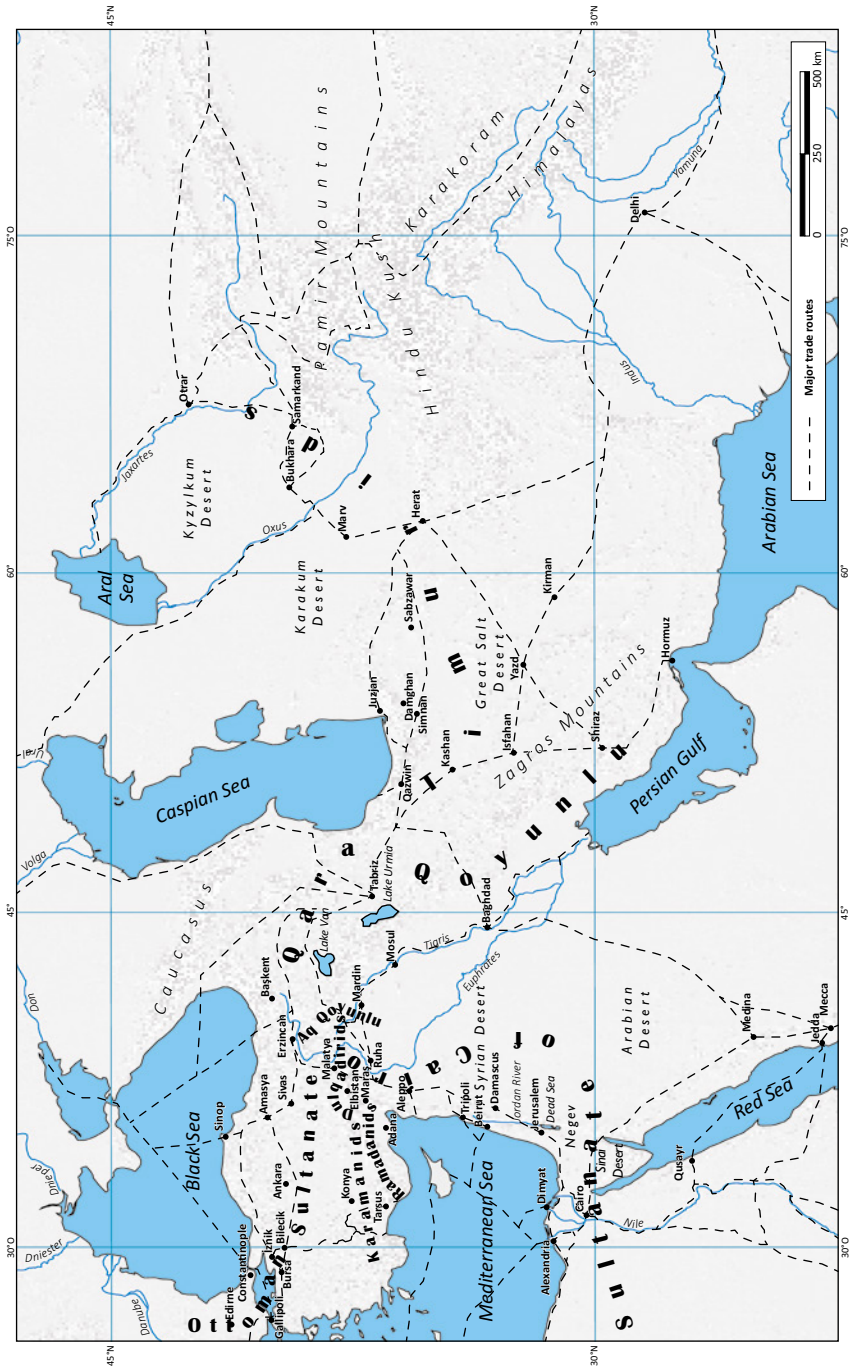
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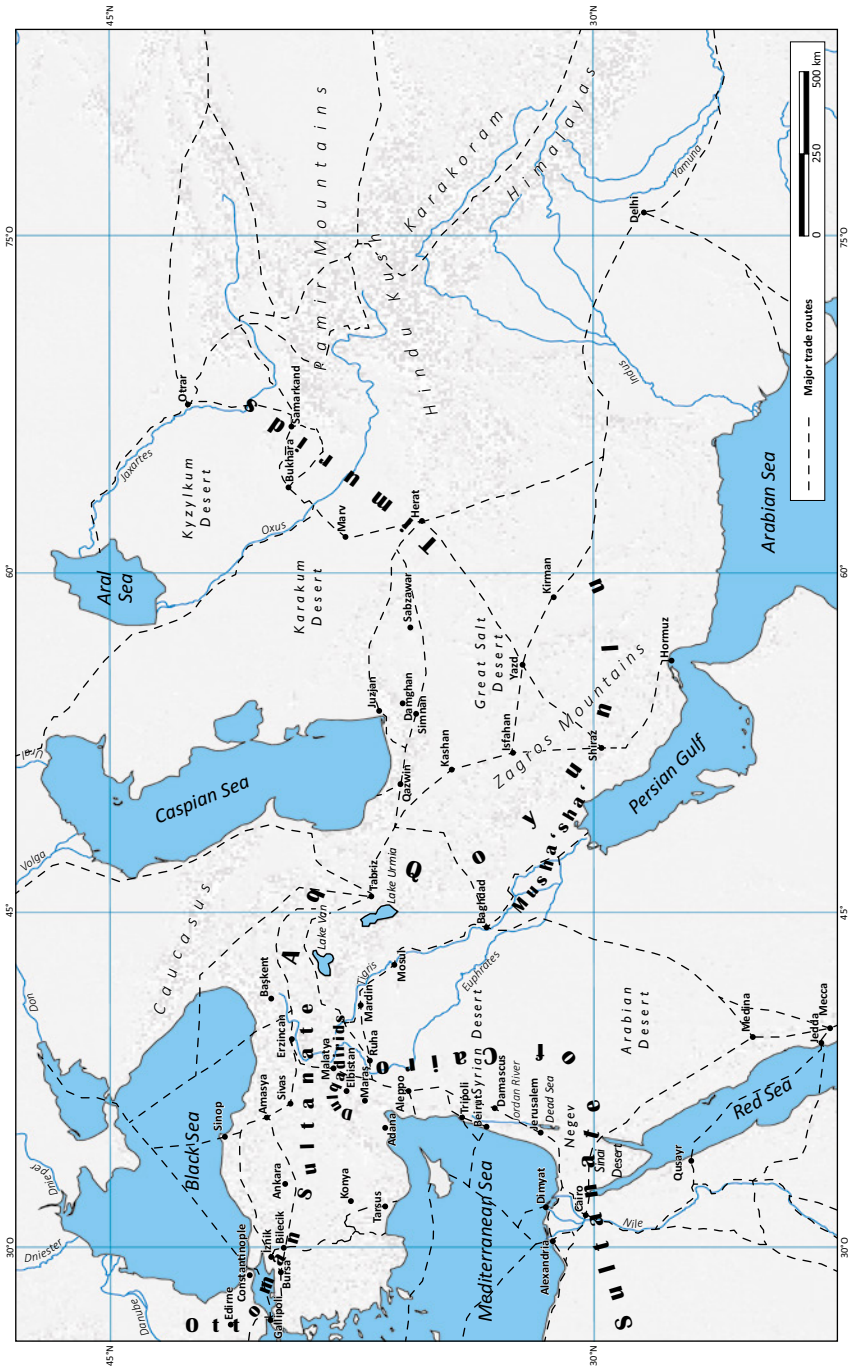
MAP 1 Main regions of Islamic West-Asia (incl. Egypt)



MAP 2 Early fifteenth-century political formations in Islamic West-Asia (incl. Egypt)



MAP 3 Mid-fifteenth-century political formations in Islamic West-Asia (incl. Egypt)



MAP 4 Late fifteenth-century political formations in Islamic West-Asia (incl. Egypt)

PART 1

Whither the Fifteenth Century?



From Temür to Selim: Trajectories of Turko-Mongol State Formation in Islamic West-Asia's Long Fifteenth Century

Jo Van Steenberghe

This chapter presents both a general overview and trans-dynastic interpretation of the power elites of fifteenth century Islamic West-Asia, their institutions and practices, and the many transformations that marked their trajectories across the rough political landscape of the time.¹ As far as that overview is concerned, the chapter retraces the general contours of these many crisscrossing trajectories of trans-regional, regional and local empowerment that distinguished the landscape from Nile to Oxus and from Bosphorus to Indus between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries CE (or the end of the eighth and the beginning of the tenth centuries AH). In a rather traditional fashion, the chapter focuses in particular on describing specific trajectories of trans-regional empowerment. These appeared in the format of dynastic and non-dynastic hegemonic constellations of power elites that engaged in competing politics of conquest, integration, reproduction and exploitation, or of war-making and state-making, on a trans-regional or even West-Asian scale. The chapter will of course also have to consider other trajectories of empowerment as equally meaningful components of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia's political history, even when they did not necessarily involve or relate to any identifiable processes of state-making. The latter trajectories range from those on the more local level of non-complex social groups related to a town, village, urban neighborhood, tribal pasture or small-scale community to regional ones, operating within more complex composites of social groups,

1 This chapter has been finalized within the context of the project 'The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate II: Historiography, Political Order and State Formation in Fifteenth-Century Egypt and Syria' (UGent, 2017–21); this project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Consolidator Grant agreement No 681510). My sincere thanks go to Evrim Binbaş, Frederik Buylaert, Kenneth Goudie, Zacharie Mochteri de Pierrepont and Patrick Wing for reading and commenting upon earlier versions of this chapter. Needless to say, I take sole responsibility for the interpretations presented here as well as for any remaining inaccuracies.

especially in particular geographic and ecological units of West-Asia's diverse landscape. For mostly practical reasons, the consideration of these local and regional trajectories will mainly be organized around their multivalent intersections with those dominant trans-regional trajectories of the Ottomans in and beyond Islamic West-Asia's Northwest, of various Timurid and Turkmen dynasts in its North and East, and of the sultans of Cairo in the Southwest. In these ways this chapter aims both to make fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia's political history in general more accessible and intelligible to wider audiences and to contextualize this volume's specific case studies, all of which relate to the remarkable processes of expansion and centralization that marked those trans-regional trajectories.

This chapter also invites specialists of the histories of these different trajectories to rethink their understanding within the wider frameworks of West-Asian connectivity and state formation. To this end, it adopts an entangled and thematic approach to these histories. This means that this chapter crosses the boundaries that tend to continue to divide West-Asia's history into separate, dynastically-organized research traditions in particular amongst Ottomanists, Mamlukologists and Timurid-Turkmen specialists. The chapter aims to integrate those dynastic boundaries more explicitly into its explanations and interpretations, seeing these as markings of variations on deeply interconnected trans-dynastic phenomena and as common sources of meaningful distinction in particular historical and historiographical contexts. In order to do so, this chapter reconstructs those phenomena and contexts into meaningful descriptive and interpretive units. The choice of units is informed by current (especially minimalist and practice-oriented) theoretical understandings of premodern states, of how they become, and what they do (and not do), as detailed in the following chapter.² The first part of the current chapter consists of introductory

2 For the sake of clarity, it is already relevant to refer here to Charles Tilly's historicizing definitions of what states are and what they do. These will be explained (and problematized) in more detail in the next chapter. However, it is a deliberate choice to allow these definitions to substantially inspire the focus and organization of this chapter. Tilly sees states as "coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories" (Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, p. 1). Elsewhere he outlines what he thinks these organizations did in the following minimalist terms: "Under the general heading of organized violence, the agents of states characteristically carry on four different activities: 1. War making: Eliminating or neutralizing their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force; 2. State making: Eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories; 3. Protection: Eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients; 4. Extraction: Acquiring the means of carrying out the first three activities—war making, state making, and protection". (Tilly, "War Making and State Making", p. 181). See

explanations that describe the main political players and playgrounds in Islamic West-Asia, while the second part takes an interpretive approach to discuss the rules and stakes of these games of power. This approach builds upon a general scholarly consensus concerning basic facts and figures, and as the next chapter engages in much detail with the current state of relevant Ottoman, Timurid-Turkmen and Syro-Egyptian political history research, literature references here are kept to a minimum, used only to support, illustrate or explain certain interpretations. This approach continues in the third part of the chapter, moving towards a more critical consideration of the historical dynamics that help to better understand the remarkable interplay of socio-political continuities and changes in Islamic West-Asia's political history. These continuities and changes appear as specific fifteenth-century convergences of phenomena that are all similarly related to processes of state formation and therefore invite to be considered from trans-regional and trans-dynastic perspectives. They include the contingency of centralizing longevity, the integration of distant power elites through multivalent processes of bureaucratic growth, the particularity of outsiders' coercive integration as a strategy of elite renewal, and simultaneously the reproduction of central elites in highly competitive ways. In the discussion of these different phenomena, occasional reference is also made to the different chapters in Parts 2 and 3, and to how their case studies make for highly illustrative examples. An epilogue finally considers the nature and formation of fifteenth-century socio-political boundaries and how these relate to specific formulations of an ideal, discursive framework of social order and political sovereignty.

1 Situating Agents and Agencies of State Formation in Fifteenth-Century West-Asia

The late fourteenth century reign of the Central-Asian ruler Temür (r. 1370–1405) was a kind of matrix moment for the histories of Islamic West-Asia's main fifteenth-century polities and political elites. Temür, also known as Tīmūr in Arabic and Persian, or as Tamerlane in European languages, certainly had a remarkable career. Remembered especially for his feats of conquest, plunder and fearsome havoc on a Eurasian scale, Temür also stands out for the unique level of personal empowerment, cultural efflorescence and successful state formation that he achieved in the Mongol, Turkish and Muslim contexts of

also Chapter Two in this volume, especially "Introduction: Defining the 'state' between Max Weber, 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun and Charles Tilly".

both the Chagatai nomadic polity of Central-Asia and the ancient urban centers and cultures of Transoxiana, Khurasan and Iran. Across Islamic West-Asia, Temür's successes stimulated the consolidation of hybrid leaderships, political identities and charismatic hegemonies that often combined Turkmen, Turkish, Kurdish, Arabo-Persian and Mongol facets. In fact, his personal politics of conquest enabled not just the rise to power of his family and entourage as a new trans-regional elite in Islamic West-Asia, but also led to the new or renewed empowerment of various local and regional elites, particularly those of a Turkmen nomadic background. In this way Temür's political action confirmed and boosted the so-called "eastward reflux" of Turko-Mongol leaderships, following the thirteenth-century wave of westward expansion from Mongol Inner Asia.³

This important moment in West-Asia's history indeed brought to power an entirely new, mostly peripatetic trans-regional power elite in Transoxiana, Khurasan and Iran (see map 2). This new elite was composed of two different groups. On the one hand there were Temür's many descendants who grew into a new dynasty of Turko-Mongol royal status known as the Timurids. On the other hand, there were the military leaders of Temür's armies, who stemmed from various Turko-Mongol Chagatai origins. Tried, tested and bred in the personal entourage of Temür, these princes and commanders continued to dominate these eastern regions' politics for many decades after Temür's death, and in varying constellations and associations that included also their own descendants. In Transoxiana and Khurasan this highly dynamic Timurid domination even lasted up to the turn of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries (see map 4).

Beyond these core areas of Timurid leadership, Temür's conquest politics of undermining or annihilating the authorities of regional and trans-regional rivals created political opportunities for various local power elites, including tribal leaderships and messianic movements, especially in the regions stretching from Iraq and Azerbaijan to Anatolia (see map 1). Throughout most of the century, these regions, with their ideal winter and summer pastures, their

3 See Loiseau, "Le siècle turc", p. 36, who takes this notion of a reflux from Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, p. 3, who, in turn, explains that he took it from the pioneering studies of Minorsky and Sümer: "Amplifying the earlier view of Minorsky, Sümer notes the eastward reflux from Anatolia of the Mongol Oïrot, Jalayir, and Süldüz after 1335/736 in addition to the three Turkmen 'waves' composed of the Qaraqyunlu, the Aqquyunlu, and the Safavid Qizilbash that swept out of Anatolia over Iran in the fifteenth/ninth and sixteenth/tenth centuries". (see Anonymous. *Tadhkirat al-mulūk: a manual of Şafavid administration (ca. 1137/1725)*, V.F. Minorsky, ed. and trans. (E.J.W. Gibb memorial series vol. 16) [London: Luzac, 1943], appendices, p. 188; Faruk Sümer, *Oğuzlar (Türkmenler), tarihleri, boy teşkilâtı, destanları* (Ankara: Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1967), pp. 143–153).

fertile river basins, and their multiple commercial networks of towns and routes, remained a politically unstable and poly-centric area, characterized not only by intense mobility but also high fluidity. They may therefore be considered one of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia's main frontier zones; an area where "one could move from place to place, allegiance to allegiance, and identity to identity with an ease and acceptability hard to even imagine in more settled societies".⁴ In fact, connecting West-Asia's centers of somewhat more stable political, commercial and cultural activities (especially—but not exclusively—the urban centers of Bursa, Edirne and Constantinople in the Northwest; Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo in the Southwest; Tabriz in the North; and Herat and Samarkand in the East) those towns and routes of Iraq, Diyar Bakr, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Anatolia, and the diverse local elites that controlled them, remained a trans-regional bone of contention, and thus were a genuine frontier zone, marking the borderlands between remote but ambitious trans-regional leaderships, such as that of the Timurid Shah Rukh (r. 1409–47) in the East, of the Ottoman sultans Murad (r. 1421–51), Mehmed (r. 1451–81) and Bayezid (r. 1481–1512) in the Northwest, and of the Sultanate of Cairo and its many *mamlūk* rulers, including the sultans Barsbay (r. 1422–38), Jaqmaq (r. 1438–53), Qaytbay (r. 1468–96) and Qansawh (r. 1501–16), in the Southwest.

First subdued by Temür's passage through Anatolia and Syria in the opening years of the fifteenth century and then all but annihilated by subsequent years of territorial fragmentation and internecine warfare, the Ottoman and Syro-Egyptian polities only re-emerged as strong trans-regional power centers from about the mid-1410s onwards (see map 2). In the process, as will be detailed below, newly composed politico-military elites rose to power in both Sultanates, and both had in common their origins of enslavement (mostly in the Balkans and in the Caucasus respectively), socialization in royal military and court service, and acculturation to particular Turkic-Muslim political identities. In many ways, these power elites thus became more alike than would be suggested by their organization around the century-old Ottoman dynasty in the Northwest and the even older Sultanate of Cairo in the Southwest. In the course of the fifteenth century a scramble for West-Asian control and influence regularly pitted these elites and their sultanic rulers against each other. Initially this conflict mostly happened indirectly, through local and regional

4 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 140–141; here he is speaking of Western Anatolia, but the definition works equally well for this frontier zone in the fifteenth century. For an illustration of frontier conditions in this zone in the 1420s and 1430s, see Adriaenssen and Van Steenbergen, "Mamluk Authorities and Anatolian Realities".

intermediaries, but increasingly it was also direct, through diplomatic exchange and military confrontation. To some extent, the campaigns of the Ottoman sultan Selim (r. 1512–20) in Azerbaijan in 1514 and his conquests of Syria in 1516, and then of Egypt in 1517, also fit into this complex pattern of ongoing regional competition for sovereignty, influence and control in that enormous frontier zone of fifteenth-century trans-regional politics. At the very least, these campaigns and conquests of the early sixteenth century radically changed the stakes that had dominated the previous century, forcing many elites and activities in the frontier zone of Armenia, Diyar Bakr and eastern Anatolia to become more firmly integrated into an exclusively Ottoman framework of sovereignty, endeavoring to push political boundaries out- and eastwards, and allowing them to be reframed more simply along an ancient East-West politico-military axis.

Before that re-orientation of the political landscape of West-Asia, however, this gigantic poly-centric zone—connecting in myriad ways Egypt, Northwest Anatolia, and Khurasan and Transoxiana—operated very much as a laboratory of fifteenth-century political (and cultural) experimentation. This involved various local and regional elites and their shifting loyalties as much as the more remote and continuously contested trans-regional leaderships of Timurids, Ottomans, Turkmen and ‘Turks’ (as the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate’s politico-military elites were identified by their contemporaries).⁵ In the historical regions of Southern and Eastern Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Diyar Bakr and Iraq in particular, various old and new movements, networks, communities and chieftainships benefitted, with varying degrees of success and sovereignty, from the renewed local political opportunities created by both

5 In remarkable contrast European and modern historiography generally all refer to members of this Syro-Egyptian power elite as Mamluks (as a result of the *mamlūk*, or military slave status of the majority of them) rather than ‘Turks’. However, this is an external label that poses many interpretive challenges for significant but as yet largely unacknowledged reasons (see Ayalon, “Bahri Mamlūks, Burji Mamlūks”; Yosef, “Dawlat al-Atrāk or Dawlat al-Mamālik?”; Van Steenbergen, “*Nomen est Omen*”; Van Steenbergen, “Mamlukisation between social theory and social practice”). In the first part of this volume we will therefore use this traditional Mamluk label when referring to the field of ‘Mamluk’ studies only, and not when referring to this Sultanate and its elites. When referring to the latter we draw on an interesting analogy (and synchronism) with standard references to the North-Indian Delhi Sultanate or Sultanate of Delhi (1206–1526) and its different ruling dynasties, including of *mamlūk* and Turkish origins. We will therefore mostly use the signifiers ‘Cairo Sultanate’ or ‘Sultanate of Cairo’ and ‘Syro-Egyptian elite’ in this volume’s first two chapters (see e.g. Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate. A political and military history* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003]; Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi, *Composite Culture under the Sultanate of Delhi. Revised and Enlarged Edition* [Delhi: Primus Books, 2016]).

Temür's campaigns and subsequent contested trans-regional leaderships. Within this fluid, permeable and poly-centric zone many participated in the endless negotiations of local balances of socio-economic, political and cultural interests with violence, charismatic leadership, millenarianist ideas and diplomatic pragmatism.⁶ Throughout the century, however, some leaderships emerged as more successful, more powerful and more regionally reputed than others in a wide range of different local contexts.

In this way, the Karamanid dynasty was first subdued by the Ottomans but then restored to their fourteenth-century regional primacy by Temür, and eventually claimed priority from the ancient Anatolian capital of Konya throughout much of the South-central Anatolian mountain lands and plains. Especially during the long and expansionist rule of Ibrahim Beg Karamanoglu (r. ca. 1423–64), the Karamanid leadership vied variously and in alternating ways with other Anatolian chiefs as well as with the Ottoman and 'Turkish' sultans for local and regional sovereignty. The Karamanids had two main competitors among these Anatolian leaderships: the Ramadanids who sought to impose some form of regional authority and control over the Cilician coastal plains from the towns of Tarsus and Adana, and the Dulkadirid lineage, similarly claiming priority on the Anti-Taurus plateau from their seats of power in the towns of Elbistan and Maraş (Kahramanmaraş) (see maps 2 and 3). From the late 1460s onwards, external pressures on these so-called 'Turkmen' dynasties in South-central Anatolia increased at a varying but unrelenting pace to the extent that they were all eventually subdued by, or fully integrated into the trans-regional claims to power and sovereignty that were emanating ever more intensely from Ottoman Constantinople in particular, as well as from Cairo (see map 4).

In the regions of Diyar Bakr, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iraq competition for local and regional priority and assets was dominated by two other Turkmen tribal groupings (see map 2). These groups seem to have maintained a higher level of transhumant activity than their Dulkadirid, Ramadanid and Karamanid peers. The chiefs of the Qara Qoyunlu (the Clan of the Black Sheep) were among the few fourteenth-century regional leaderships that managed to survive Temür's onslaught and they eventually even regained priority status in and beyond their former east-Anatolian territories. This was above all thanks to their charismatic Qara Qoyunlu chief Qara Yusuf (d. 1420), whose military

6 See e.g. Binbaş, "Did the Hurufis Mint Coins?", p. 139, which refers briefly to various "intellectual movements which acquired a political character and minted coins in the late medieval period", as well as to "other cases in which the boundaries between tribal-cum-local elites and religious-intellectual networks are blurred or cannot be drawn accurately".

successes from 1406 onwards established his sovereignty over all of these regions, effectively forming a block within this enormous zone between the Caucasus and the Persian Gulf which hindered the territorial ambitions and interests of the Timurid Shah Rukh in Herat in particular. Qara Yusuf's son and successor Iskandar (d. 1438) was confronted with the consequences of this growing tension, in the form of substantial pressures from Shah Rukh and his armies as well as from various local groups acting as allies to the Timurids or others. These pressures eventually all proved ineffective, and Iskandar's son Jahan Shah (r. 1439–67) managed to consolidate his predecessors' achievements, even stepping into the Timurid void after Shah Rukh's death and establishing his own sovereignty over many formerly Timurid lands in Iran. Jahan Shah achieved this from the Qara Qoyunlu center in Tabriz, eventually evolving into an awe-inspiring trans-regional ruler in his own right over most of central West-Asia (see map 3).

In 1467, when Jahan Shah was captured in battle and executed, the story of Qara Qoyunlu trans-regional leadership in Eastern Anatolia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iraq and Iran proved to be short-lived. However, more consolidated Turkmen rule in these regions continued along very similar lines, when Uzun Hasan (r. 1457–78), leader of the Aq Qoyunlu (the Clan of the White Sheep), seized the opportunity to step into Jahan Shah's footsteps. This led to the accommodation, absorption or integration of Qara Qoyunlu (and formerly Timurid) relationships, balances, and achievements into an adapted trans-regional order, now dominated by the Qara Qoyunlu's longstanding Anatolian rivals of the Aq Qoyunlu. It also meant that the Aq Qoyunlu tribal group and its leaders finally extended their influence beyond the mere control of the trade routes and the transhumant network of Diyar Bakr and Southern Armenia (see maps 2 and 3). This zone until then had defined their area of operation, competition and relationships since the days of the alliance between Temür and one of the Aq Qoyunlu's most charismatic early chiefs, Uzun Hasan's grandfather ʿUthman Beg Qara Yuluk (d. 1435). Uzun Hasan and his immediate successors now took Tabriz in Azerbaijan as their seat of power and they maintained for more than three decades at least some level of sovereignty over the highly diverse chain of lands, people and resource flows that connected the Caucasian mountain lands, the Iraqi lowlands and the Iranian plateau (see map 4). In that enormous frontier zone of fifteenth-century trans-regional politics these territories thus increasingly became a more or less coherent political space that was organized around Turkmen leadership in Tabriz. In the Southwest, the expansion of this new political coherence was curbed by Syria's ancient dominance from Cairo. In the Northwest its reach was limited by an equally increasingly coherent Ottoman sovereignty and Anatolian dominance, sealed

by the Ottoman victory over Uzun Hasan at the Battle of Bashkent in eastern Anatolia in 1473. In the East, the reach of Turkmen transregional authority continued to be checked by Timurid princes claiming leadership from the main urban centers of Khurasan and Transoxiana.

2 **Situating Practices and Institutions of State Formation in Fifteenth Century West-Asia**

In some ways these competing leaderships of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia, from Ottoman, Syro-Egyptian and Timurid sultans to various Turkmen leaders and rulers, all have similar profiles, marked by the marginality of their social origins, the martial nature of their socio-political identities and the ‘Turkishness’ of their linguistic and cultural idiom. Given the common setting of their political action amidst Islamic West-Asia’s settled Arabo-Persian environments, the historical profiles of these sultans, leaders and rulers are all also marked by the same experimental creativity and hybrid mix of memories, practices and institutions that they and their entourages used to explain and reproduce the messy and often violent political realities that emerged from these marginal, martial and Turkish contexts. Across Islamic West-Asia, these diverse fifteenth-century realities of leadership and their explanations all remained deeply rooted in longstanding interconnected imaginations and traditions of trans-regional political action. This type of political connectivity is often labeled as the Turko-Mongol factor of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. This is a shorthand for capturing the combined features of nomadic (or semi-nomadic) roots and Perso-Islamic, Turko-Saljuq and Mongol-Chinggisid precedent that determined in multivalent structuring ways these realities and explanations of political action across fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia.

The second part of this chapter will provide an overview of those Turko-Mongol features that are central to understanding fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia’s history and the politics of its leaderships. These involve particular practices and institutions of socio-political reproduction and transformation, of socio-economic accumulation and redistribution, and of political organization and state formation. These main practices and institutions of Turko-Mongol politics are discussed here only in a general way. As announced above, the purpose here is to frame these features from trans-dynastic perspectives and informed by state formation studies. As such an approach is not very common within the field of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asian history, it has to be stressed that the occasionally more unorthodox interpretations that are

also presented here are above all intended to stimulate further discussion and exploration.

2.1 *Turko-Mongol Socio-political Praxis*

The presence and impact of the Turko-Mongol factor as outlined above have been generally regarded as being most visible through the widespread ancient appanage and tanistry practices that continued to regulate the distribution and reproduction of power, status and resources within elite lineages and political communities. These practices operated in diverse and multivalent ways between Cairo, Constantinople, Tabriz and Herat, and they continued to rein-vigorate centrifugal tendencies and to obfuscate or even obstruct the pathways towards political stabilization and centralization, albeit with varying levels of success. Appanage and its cognate tanistry refer to the fact that the Turko-Mongol mindset considered entitlement to privileges and social distinction, as well as succession to status, wealth, power and authority, as collective elitist arrangements. At the same time, these arrangements were nowhere organized in any straightforward hierarchies of individual rights, priorities and obligations. Rather, they always had to be acquired in highly competitive social circumstances, and agnatic kinship and seniority were only one asset among many here, alongside highly individualized qualities such as ambition, charisma, political acumen, coercive prowess and even longevity. Political participation in this context of regular dynastic fragmentation and violent succession to leadership was not just a matter of birth or choice, but also of social survival and necessity, and power elites were left with no choice but to partake actively and continuously in political action. As a result, this politicization of all social relationships continued to favor the individual expertise and personal clout of successful military entrepreneurs among the members of those elites. “[Tanistry] politicized society, and it personalized monarchy”, as one of the pioneers of the study of Inner Asian and Turko-Mongol politics, Joseph Fletcher, put it.⁷

7 Fletcher, “Turco-Mongolian Monarchic Tradition in the Ottoman Empire”, p. 240. See also Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, pp. 19–23 (following Dickson, “Uzbek Dynastic Theory in the Sixteenth Century”) for a more nuanced (if limiting) consideration of the tensions between so-called corporatism and dynasticism that together constitute tanistry as it is conceptualized here. Whereas in the Ottoman context, as Fletcher argues, this practice gave rise to the well-known (and eventually codified) royal succession tradition of fratricide, its dividing presence in and impact on Timurid and Turkmen dispensations is also well known. (See also Binbaş, “Condominial Sovereignty and Condominial Messianism” for an interesting corrective about shared notions of rule in certain Timurid contexts). This phenomenon is perhaps most tellingly illustrated by the ways in which the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahan Shah stepped into the footsteps of the Timurid Shah Rukh or how the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan stepped into those of Jahan Shah. For examples and discussions from the Cairo Sultanate in the Southwest,

In this context of Turko-Mongol political praxis, success was highly personal, and leaders such as Temür, Murad, Jaqmaq, Uzun Hasan and their peers and descendants had to constantly fight for their survival. Political order and stability were a widely shared responsibility as well as a highly volatile symbolic construction, which faced continuous pressures, both from within and from without. In fact, as will be detailed below, the Ottoman Sultanate in the Northwest, its 'Turkish' counterpart in the Syro-Egyptian Southwest, the Timurids in Khurasan and Transoxiana and somewhat belatedly also the Turkmen in Azerbaijan and Iran managed to check the returning centrifugal consequences of these practices and pressures, even though in most cases only in contingent ways and to a certain extent. The process of state formation in these cases featured the gradual appearance of a coherent central political apparatus and of the concomitant idea that there was one autonomous 'Turkish', Ottoman, Timurid or eventually even Turkmen hegemonic political order. This process favored, in diverse ways, centripetal strategies that limited any effects of the elite fragmentations that were plaguing taniatric moments of succession in Cairo, in Edirne and Constantinople, in Tabriz, and in Herat and Samarkand. This never happened in any similarly stabilizing ways for other leaderships with trans-regional ambitions in fifteenth-century West-Asia, and the evaporation of Timurid authorities in Anatolia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iraq and West-Iran and the successive territorial expansions of the Qara and Aq Qoyunlu between the 1450s and 1470s had as much to do with these internal reproductive weaknesses as with the military successes of charismatic leaders like Jahan Shah and Uzun Hasan.

Most important for a proper understanding of the impact of Turko-Mongol socio-political praxis, perhaps, is the fact that, even under the latter Timurid and Turkmen umbrellas of unstable trans-regional leaderships, rapid political transformation had no more effect on the political practices and identities of most local and regional power elites in Eastern Anatolia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iraq and most of Iran than it did on their counterparts in the more stable political contexts of Ottoman Anatolia, 'Turkish' Syro-Egypt, or Timurid Khurasan and Transoxiana. Loyalties and allegiances shifted and sovereignties and regional priorities were constantly renegotiated, while political spaces and fields of power were incessantly redefined as a consequence of taniatric competition. In all of these regions, however, local and regional groups of political actors and their stakes and assets were far more enduring, changing primarily as a consequence of the many realities of social, cultural and physical mobility.

see Adriaenssen and Van Steenbergen, "Mamluk Authorities and Anatolian Realities"; Van Steenbergen, "Caught between Heredity and Merit".

This relative social stability moreover not only concerned those who propagated rural or urban violence in ever changing political constellations, but it also characterized many other elite groups and individuals who wielded some form of leverage and political clout. All of this meant that across Islamic West-Asia, Turko-Mongol leaderships never fully achieved any monopoly of power as their political relationships tended to be crisscrossed, checked or even undermined not just by appanage and tanistry practices, but also by the assets, strategies, and tools of those who had other skills to tap into local and regional flows of cultural, political and economic resources. Beatrice Manz, in her study of the reign of the Timurid ruler Shah Rukh, described as follows the effect of this atomistic and highly volatile situation on the political landscape within which the Timurids operated:

The towns from which the Timurids ruled their dominions were like an archipelago within a sea of semi-independent regions, over which control was a matter of luck, alliance and an occasional punitive expedition.⁸

As illustrated by the different case studies of local and regional elites in Part 3 of this volume, this powerful archipelago metaphor is not just a very good approximation of the situation in West-Asia's Timurid East. On the ground, in and out of the limelight of trans-regional political power, all kinds of constellations of scholars, merchants, bureaucrats and local rural and urban leaders participated actively and often equally successfully in the translation and accommodation to local and regional realities of trans-regional claims to power and primacy. As will be detailed below, the social, cultural and financial entrepreneurship of these groups alongside their knowhow and access to all kinds of resources made them equally important, powerful and impactful both for the highly personalized and tanistic successes of all kinds of Turko-Mongol leaderships in West-Asia's more peripheral zones as well as for (or against) the more coherent processes of central state formation in the Ottoman Northwest, the 'Turkish' Southwest, the Turkmen North and the Timurid East of Islamic West-Asia. As it played out in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia, Turko-Mongol socio-political praxis was therefore not just highly personalized, tanistic and violent. It also displayed a strong tendency towards fluidity and poly-centrism. All these Turko-Mongol qualifications therefore invite one to consider West-Asian power as a relational and circulating historical phenomenon that connected and disconnected local, regional and trans-regional social realities in myriad centrifugal and centripetal ways. The growing visibility

⁸ Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 2.

of the latter integrative tendencies in some parts of West-Asia should never obfuscate the continued workings of the former decentralizing and poly-centric forces in the peripheries as well as in the centers of the Ottoman, Syro-Egyptian, Turkmen and Timurid trajectories of state formation.

2.2 *Turko-Mongol Political Economies*

These diverse local, regional and trans-regional elites were actually connected through access to Islamic West-Asia's many resources in more defining and structuring ways than they were through Turko-Mongol socio-political praxis. It is therefore also appropriate to give some consideration here to this, and to the diverse but related sets of tributary, fiscal and proprietor relationships and of redistributive arrangements that distinguished fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia's political economies. These have to be understood against the background of a brief contemplation of the region's wider symbiotic nomadic, agricultural and commercial economies.

The recurrent tendency in Turko-Mongol politics towards "internecine warfare" did "minimal damage to a nomadic economy", as explained Joseph Fletcher. "[T]o an agricultural economy, on the other hand", Fletcher continued, "it was destructive, sometimes disastrous".⁹ For many centuries, West-Asia's diverse, rich and longstanding agricultural economies had been forced to accommodate the many changes wrought, in more and less destructive ways, by the influx of Inner-Asian nomads and their tanistic politics. In the fifteenth century, that accommodation continued, due both to the pressures of the Turko-Mongol reflux from West to East and the impact of more particular socio-economic phenomena, not least the mid-fourteenth-century Black Death pandemic and similar, more restricted, epidemic cycles of pestilence, plague and depopulation. Throughout Islamic West-Asia, a transhumant nomadic economy, controlled by Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen and many other tribal leaderships, had thus come to occupy a much more prominent space, and these groups often functionally shared the diverse rural landscapes of the region with agricultural ventures of a reduced and mostly relatively modest local scale. This created a particular trans-regional economic context that, though fundamentally different from any earlier trans-regional situation, proved resilient enough to the political realities of endless warfare to maintain a reasonable level of sufficiency.

An important factor here also was undoubtedly the fact that these symbiotic nomadic and agricultural economies were supported by the fifteenth-century mercantile networks that increasingly strengthened connections amongst

⁹ Fletcher, "Turco-Mongolian Monarchic Tradition in the Ottoman Empire", p. 242.

and beyond West-Asia's many long-standing and densely populated urban centers and towns. This booming business of the circulation of local, regional and trans-regional merchants and commodities (including luxury goods such as spices and also slaves and furs) had also very successfully adapted to accommodate the recurrent political insecurities of the time, operating along rhythms of exchange and along flows of resources that managed to produce in many ways their own commercial realities.¹⁰ On a local level, these realities were undoubtedly also volatile, affected by ecological and demographic uncertainties and intersected by all kinds of competing interests that could be equally political and economic. Across the board, however, the era's political and economic volatilities did not necessarily mirror each other thanks to the resilience of local economic communities as well as their capacity to adapt. Many of these communities also empowered themselves by acting as links in the intensifying chains of West-Asian routes and towns that connected the Mediterranean, Inner Asian and Indian Ocean trade zones. Islamic West-Asia's fifteenth-century cultural efflorescence and its reputation as an age of cultural innovation and creativity, and of trans-regional networks of defining scholarship and knowledge practices, are very much testimony to the ways in which these changing socio-economic realities had somehow managed to accommodate the potentially destructive effects of Turko-Mongol political praxis.

Turko-Mongol political praxis in this post-Temür age, however, had also been shaped in many ways by those same socio-economic changes. The aforementioned appanage and tanistry practices of dynastic fragmentation and violent succession to leadership were not static normative devices that structured political action in unchanging or uniform destructive ways. They rather represented deep-rooted traditions that were constantly being re-invented and re-imagined according to the necessities of time and space, thus offering many potential solutions to all kinds of challenges. This was also true of the challenges posed by the new political and socio-economic realities of the fifteenth century, and of the great variety of more or less successful solutions pursued across Islamic West-Asia by the new, or renewed, elites of the post-Temür era. This pragmatic interplay between leadership challenges and solutions played out most directly on the local level, when political and socio-economic realities intertwined and Turko-Mongol elites everywhere tried again to tap into

10 Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*; Inalcik, "Bursa and the Commerce of the Levant"; Inalcik, "Ḥarīr ii—The Ottoman Empire"; for wider commercial (and related political) connections east- and westward, see also Vallet, *L'Arabie marchande*; Meloy, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade*; Coulon, *Barcelone et le grand commerce d'Orient*.

the region's changing flows of resources and accelerating rhythms of exchange. The intense and highly interconnected cultural and intellectual life of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia was very much an outcome of these pragmatic politics of local revenue extraction, thriving as it had before on the patronage of these elites, on the political needs of their competing leaderships, and on the many opportunities for others beyond the direct control of these particular elites. Cultural and intellectual innovation were stimulated by regional competition, by the ubiquitous scramble for social distinction and political legitimation, and by the fertile hybridization of Arabo- and Perso-Islamic, Turkic and Turko-Mongol lore, and these developments found a welcome partner in the West-Asian empowerment of the relatively small groups of highly mobile West-Asian power elites of the post-Temür era. Rather than being undermined by the era's continuous outbursts of rivalry and violence, the cultural efflorescence of the fifteenth century in many ways was sustained by the constant opportunities generated by these endless renegotiations of local, regional and trans-regional balances of interest.¹¹

Across fifteenth century West-Asia, Turko-Mongol elites attempted in many different ways to tap into the region's flows of resources and rhythms of exchange. Even though fiscal institutional precedents created a semblance of uniformity, these attempts were determined by local circumstances as much as by trans-local ambitions or centralizing initiatives. The most defining factor in all this, so it appears, was actually the changing contingency of a political center's distance from, and level of control over the economic assets in a locality. Territories and periods marred by political competition, warfare and campaigns of conquest and redress were hit most forcefully by the potentially destructive economic effects of Turko-Mongol politics. In such contexts, harvests, livestock, commodities or other resources were invariably looted, and then distributed as booty among campaigners and their followers along *ad hoc* hierarchies of military investment and political interest. After Temür's endless campaigning, and throughout the fifteenth century, West-Asia's regions that continued to be most regularly plagued by these coercive politics of resource extraction were the politically unstable poly-centric zone of Iraq, Diyar Bakr, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Eastern Anatolia and their winter and summer pastures, fertile river basins and multiple commercial networks of towns and routes.

11 The Russian historian Vasilij Vladimirovič Bartol'd (1869–1930) already made this point regarding Timurid history; in due course it was framed with the label of a Timurid “renaissance”, see Barthold, *Ulugh-beg*; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, pp. 4–5.

In many cases, however, mitigating arrangements between local and campaigning leaderships followed, or forestalled, such economically and politically disruptive moments. Often, precious gifts were exchanged and tributes in cash and kind were pledged to confirm such arrangements, generating alternative, more controlled mechanisms to provide a return on the investments required for military campaigning. Depending on the circumstances, and also on the extent to which promises could be enforced, such *ad hoc* settlements between local and central elites could transform into more structural arrangements, including varieties of what essentially were tax farming engagements. Indeed, throughout the fifteenth century, these fluid arrangements arguably shaped the majority of economic relationships between local and central elites across Islamic West-Asia, appearing from Egypt over Western Anatolia to Transoxiana as the means best suited to balance the continuities of local actors and practices against the volatilities of Turko-Mongol politics and socio-economic changes. Such arrangements required minimal investments from central elites and helped maintain some level of authority over more peripheral social or territorial spaces. At the same time, these practices integrated Arab, Turkmen, Kurdish or other urban, rural and tribal elites into the authority structures of a political center by giving them a stake in the maintenance of political and economic order. As suggested above, the nature and extent of those stakes, alongside the level of integration of local and regional elites, and even the identity of that political center remained the object of fierce competition, negotiation and transformation throughout the century and across the continent.

More direct and unilateral fiscal systems of resource flow tended to complement, marginalize or even displace tax farming and tributary arrangements in areas that were more stable politically such as Ottoman Anatolia, 'Turkish' Syro-Egypt or Timurid Khurasan and Transoxiana, as well as in the proximity and catchment area of powerful leaders, such as Jahan Shah and Uzun Hasan. In each of these West-Asian power centers, broadly similar invasive rural and urban tax regimes were in operation, inspired by longstanding local and regional fiscal traditions, and leading to greater integration of taxpayers, beneficiaries and financial administrators into centralizing economic and political orders. In all regions these more direct tax regimes derived from a combination of ancient Islamic taxes, most importantly the land tax—or *kharaj*—and the poll tax—or *jizya*—together with a range of customs duties and related, mostly urban, taxes and forced payments that were not similarly sanctified by Muslim scripture. For many centuries, especially the *kharaj*'s tithe payments in cash and kind had provided a steady flow of income for the region's elites, and this did not radically alter in the fifteenth century. At the same time, however, the period's socio-economic changes certainly also affected the flow of those traditional

resources, increasing the importance of other types of income, not least through these elites' fiscal and other forms of participation in West-Asia's, and Eurasia's, commercial economies.¹²

The redistribution of these fiscal and related resources among political elites in West-Asia was everywhere similarly organized as a regionally interconnected and dynamic practice of land tenure and remuneration rooted in a mixture of precedents. Most of the economic assets and activities in Islamic West-Asia that were somehow subject to more direct tax regimes were connected to lands and rights that legally (at least in theory) belonged to the ruler, in his capacity as the personification of the sovereign political order, or the state. This proprietorship was then parceled out in fiscal concessions and fiscal exemptions to his household, to his courtiers and military leaders, and to other relevant beneficiaries in return for their loyalties and services. In the Anatolian context the main type of grant in this practice of controlled, but devolved, royal remuneration and fiscal administration was known in Ottoman Turkish as a *timar*, and its holders, the *timariot*, were all cavalrymen (*sipahi*) with varying ranks, status and responsibilities. In 'Turkish' Syro-Egypt the Arabic noun *iqta'* was used to refer to a concession in the arrangements that organized and regulated the distribution of tax income to the Sultanate's various military commanders (*amīrs*) and their bands of horsemen. In Timurid and Turkmen lands similar arrangements prevailed among the entourages of rulers, but there these fiscal, administrative and proprietorship grants were referred to as *soyurghal*, or also as *tiyul* or *ulka*. The various forms, names and arrangements which this prebendal practice took in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asian courts were all rooted in shared local customs and traditions that often originated in the tenth-century history of the region. These forms, names and arrangements also overlapped everywhere in more or less explicit ways with the Turko-Mongol appanage practice of shared but segmented authority. Invariably, they confirmed military leaders of Turko-Mongol background in their role as receivers and beneficiaries in West-Asia's fiscal resource flows, as active partners and stakeholders in the region's economies, and as managers of their own socio-political, military and economic resources or estates, even during moments of accelerating central state formation. All over Islamic West-Asia this prebendal practice finally appeared as the normative way of organizing the political economy around successful trans-regional leaders and power

12 This point is especially made in Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*; for a strong argument supporting the idea of very active early Ottoman participation in the Mediterranean commercial economy, see Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman Empire*.

elites. Bound to be expanded and pushed to the contested social and territorial frontiers of these leaders' effective reach, however, this practice never entirely gave way to feudal hierarchies of benefit and service, but rather continuously intersected and competed with other arrangements such as centralizing fiscal regulations and local tax farming and tributary solutions, alongside alternative land tenure provisions, especially those for religious endowments (*waqf*).¹³

In order to understand fifteenth-century Turko-Mongol political economies, it is also extremely relevant to consider in more detail the intersections between this multifarious prebendal practice, the latter construction of Muslim religious endowments and centralizing regulations which appeared in some of the politically more stabilized parts of West-Asia. The land tenure system of fifteenth-century Egypt in particular has been demonstrated to have undergone a remarkable transformation, generally identified as *waqf*-ization. This notion of *waqf*-ization stands for the legal process by which the status of taxable land was changed to that of *waqf*-land, by incorporating the land and the income that it generates into the semi-closed, religiously sanctified and tax-exempted socio-economic circuit of a religious endowment (*waqf*). Institutions for religious practice and education, their salaried staff and students and related forms of expenditure were very often part of this specific socio-economic circuit. At the same time, in fifteenth-century Syro-Egypt, such circuit similarly often included amongst its main beneficiaries specific household and family members and the descendants of the private person who created the *waqf* and donated its main assets. For the latter reason in particular, the process of *waqf*-ization has also been likened to a process of de-centralization and privatization. Many, if not most, of the Sultanate's courtiers and political leaders, very often also including sultans themselves, pursued all kinds of legal and financial strategies to subvert the centralized system of land tenure and fiscal redistribution. They alienated state lands traditionally parceled out as *iqta'* and acquired full control over their assets by assigning them to their religious endowments, and thus to the long-term benefit of particular religious institutions and, most importantly, of their family and household. As such, *waqf*-ization was an effective strategy for enabling the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate's elite families in particular to anticipate, contain and very often also overcome, at least in socio-economic terms, the volatilities of Turko-Mongol politics and the many political changes that affected the Sultanate in the fifteenth century.¹⁴

13 See Inalcik, "Autonomous Enclaves in Islamic States".

14 Amīn, *Al-Awqāf wa-l-Hayā al-Ijtīmā'īya*; Petry, "Fractionalized Estates in a Centralized Regime"; Abu Ghazi, *Tatawwur al-Ḥiyāza*; Sabra, "The Rise of a New Class?".

At the same time, however, recent research has begun to make clear that this is not just a question of decentralization or of socio-economic privatization and survival. It is also a story of a substantial political transformation in the fifteenth-century Sultanate. This was due to the fact that, over time, control over some of the largest and most profitable *waqf*-estates in the Syro-Egyptian realm was actually transferred back to the central state, in particular to an increasingly clearly defined small number of the highest court offices. Positions such as those of the ‘chief commander of the armies’ (*atabak al-‘asakir*), ‘senior head guard’ (*ra’s nawba kabir*), and ‘grand chamberlain’ (*hajib hujjab*) came to be directly associated with the financial management of major *waqfs*. In ways that warrant further research, these major *waqfs* had often been endowed by previous sultans and they were linked to the upkeep of Cairo’s main religious infrastructures, such as the Mansuri hospital, the Ashrafi religious complexes inside and outside the city walls, or the Mu’ayyadi congregational mosque next to the Southern gate. This meant that any military leaders who occupied these powerful offices at Cairo’s court also automatically acquired control over these important estates and their resources. These leaders were then given the opportunity to transfer to their own households the substantial surplus generated by these *waqf*-lands in Egypt and Syria. They thereby moved from the administration of one set of *waqf*-estates to another as they made their careers at court and accumulated ever more resources. In the meantime, most of these leaders also used the riches they assembled in this way to set up their own religious endowments, continuing the afore-mentioned *waqf*-ization process and working to the socio-economic benefit of their own households and families.¹⁵ In many ways, therefore, the accelerating transformation of Egypt’s land tenure system through *waqf*-ization and the paradoxical reintegration of *waqf*-estates in the state apparatus were related factors. They both contributed to, but were also partly generated by, the formation in Cairo of a small but particular set of state actors. As will be discussed in more detail below, these figures all rose from very humble origins, distinguished themselves through many years of military and court service, and eventually managed to accumulate substantial political and economic resources in the process. Different sets of these particular state actors, and their huge personalized resources, continued to influence successions and the political stability within the Sultanate throughout the fifteenth century. A handful of these men, including figures such as Jaqmaq (r. 1438–53), Inal (r. 1453–61), Khushqadam (r. 1461–7), Qaytbay (r. 1468–96) and Qansawh (r. 1501–16), even managed to

15 Igarashi, *Land Tenure and Mamluk Waqfs*, esp. pp. 29–32, 42–45; Van Steenberghe & Termonia, “State Formation, Military Entrepreneurship, and Waqfisation”.

rise to the highest court office of sultan after long careers of service and of resource accumulation.

Elsewhere in Islamic West-Asia, the *waqf* institution also continued to play an important role in structuring socio-economic and political relationships. In the Ottoman and Timurid territories, as well as in the more fluid zone of Eastern Anatolia, Armenia, Diyar Bakr, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Iran, this infrastructure similarly enabled the structural patronage, cultural promotion and political integration of wide varieties of particular religio-cultural communities and their leaders, followers and practices. In these parts of Islamic West-Asia, the *waqf* institution also provided for a legal and socio-economic mechanism to protect elite families, households and other social groups against the vicissitudes of Turko-Mongol politics. However, only some of these endowments were integrated or linked with the political apparatus of these regions' rulers. As semi-closed local or regional circuits of agricultural, manufactural and commercial estates and assets, of expenditure for specific religious and communal purposes, of sovereign provisions prescribed by Islamic scripture and the law, as well as of rural and urban expertise, the majority of *waqf* endowments in Islamic West-Asia actually operated as an alternative, unusually stable, set of socio-economic arrangements for various elite groups to participate in the endless negotiations of local and regional relationships and balances of power. The semi-closed, sovereign and communal character of the *waqf* institution actually made it into a very powerful centrifugal instrument in the hands of power elites. It facilitated the intersection of centripetal ambitions and relationships emanating from Bursa, Edirne and Istanbul, from Tabriz, Herat, and Samarkand, and even from Cairo and Damascus with other equally powerful, institutionalized relationships, which had substantial socio-economic, cultural as well as political impact on a local or regional level. As explained above, in fifteenth-century Cairo this centrifugal dynamic was somehow complemented by a more constructive participation of *waqf* endowments in the state formation process. In the East, Timurid rulers and their entourages started pursuing a parallel re-integration and more centripetal operationalization of the *waqf* (*vaqf* in Persian) institution within the politics of the central court.¹⁶ In Anatolia, however, the Ottoman state pursued a different policy, changing the legal status of rural properties and endowments (*vakf* in Ottoman Turkish), or even seizing them. This happened to increasing numbers

16 Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, esp. Chapter Five: "Piety and Pragmatism: the Role of the Islamic Endowment" (pp. 148–191); McChesney, *Waqf in Central Asia*, esp. Chapters Two ("The Origins of the 'Alid Shrine at Balkh'") and Three ('Waqf in its Political Setting') (pp. 21–70).

of rural properties and endowments belonging to groups and families in various parts of Western, Central and eventually even Eastern Anatolia. This forced expansion of the Anatolian land tenure system under direct Ottoman control was actually part and parcel of the process of centralization that followed sultan Mehmed's (r. 1451–81) conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Many local Anatolian elites' privately-owned and *waqf* lands were transferred to become Ottoman state lands (*miri*). They thus ended up as property of the Ottoman sultan in his capacity as the personification of the Ottoman political order and were parceled out as *timars* to the sultan's cavalry elites, the *sipahi*, or these lands were at least tied to a requirement of some form of military service from its original proprietors. In the process of the formation of the Ottoman state in the fifteenth century, therefore, it were the radical annihilation of the *waqf* institution's atomistic and even centrifugal dynamic as well as the maximization of the *timar* system as a function of the expansion of the dynasty's military apparatus that were the main targets of the central Ottoman court's socio-economic policy.¹⁷

2.3 *Turko-Mongol Political Apparatuses*

These diverse redistributive arrangements in the political economies of Islamic West-Asia were all also interrelated as far as the administrative and authority structures that appeared to organize them are concerned. At this point it is therefore necessary also to briefly outline the organizational appearances of Turko-Mongol political power in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia and to consider their differing levels of complexity and penetration in and beyond the main centers of Ottoman, Syro-Egyptian, Turkmen and Timurid power, and also to explore how they transformed throughout the century.

As suggested above, these organizational arrangements all operated along devolved and even atomistic modes of power and control that remind us of the appanage practices of Turko-Mongol politics. These arrangements and their varying degrees of political integration often also coalesced with those practices and provided them with a more structured, institutionalized, appearance. Most of the princes, courtiers, military commanders, cavalrymen and other urban, rural and tribal leaders and elite communities of fifteenth century Islamic West-Asia were all very much left to their own devices with regards to organizing access management for the resources they controlled or which had been assigned to them. Even holders of a *timar*, an *iqta'* and a *soyurghal* had to attend to their own economic and military needs and responsibilities, and they

¹⁷ İnalcık, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 126–131; İnalcık, "Autonomous Enclaves in Islamic States", pp. 118, 124.

mostly did so in organizational formats that appeared like down-scaled versions of trans-regional rulers' courts and administrations.

This segmentation of how fiscal relationships were organized in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia, even in the vicinities of strong rulers and expanding states, is another function of the personalized nature of Turko-Mongol politics. The remaining instability and volatility of political realities across the region regularly cut across processes of more intense trans-local political integration and subordination of elites, even in the more stabilizing political orders of the Ottoman Northwest, the 'Turkish' Southwest, the Turkmen North and the Timurid East. In the latter statist contexts especially, leaders continued to pursue a more coherent administrative level of integration and central control through the enforcement of particular regulations, such as the temporary and non-hereditary allocation of prebendal grants, the assignment of territorially dispersed prebendal lands, the rapid transfer of grant holders between estates, or alternative remunerations from central repositories. However, centrifugal tendencies to subvert these regulations remained equally strong, as in the *waqf*-ization process, as well as more generally in the atomistic and diverse practical organization of the management of grants, tax farms, tributes, endowments and estates. For this reason, the costs of enforcing these regulations for central authorities often proved extremely high. As a result, rulers and elites throughout fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia continued to favor a diversity of *ad hoc* and middle-ground solutions serving a variety of local and centralizing needs and interests, even in the increasingly stable contexts of the Syro-Egyptian and Ottoman Sultanates.¹⁸

Overall during this period, these devolved, segmented and negotiated ways of organizing fiscal relationships were actually part and parcel of the rather light and messy wider arrangements that accompanied the political fortunes of the region's Turko-Mongol rulers, dynasties and power elites. Just like redistributive practices, these organizational arrangements throughout the region were rooted in various hazy combinations of longstanding bureaucratic precedents, local managerial requirements and particular types of expertise and opportunity. Basically, every man of status and every leader high or low had to find his own solutions to the challenges of collecting and paying his dues, of communicating with sovereigns, peers and subordinates, and of safeguarding his patrimony. Across the region, solutions to these challenges were largely

18 Inalcik, "Autonomous Enclaves in Islamic States"; Inalcik's attempt to create a better sense of the meanings and roles of "*Temliks*, *Soyurghals*, *Yurdluk-Ocaqluks*, *Mâlikâne-Muqâta'as* and *Awqâf*" certainly leaves the reader with this impression of diversity and *ad hoc* solutions.

determined by local circumstances, as well as by regional and historical conditions, and, above all, by the sliding scale of a man's power. Here, both personalized politics and volatile political realities defined the level of complexity of organizational challenges and their solutions as well as, importantly, the composition, size and fate of the administrative and military staff supporting a leader in his duties.

Everywhere, relationships of power, whatever their level of complexity and authority, coalesced around basic organizational units of groups of people bound together through multivalent sets of personalized ties. As in preceding centuries, these bonds ranged from various kinship arrangements to mutual loyalties acquired through social action. As far as the diverse Turko-Mongol leaderships of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia are concerned, there was a range of more or less structured formats in which these organizational units of people and social ties could appear, depending on a man's power. Peripatetic warbands of military leaders and their associates and personal retainers were one, often more short-lived, format that continued to make its mostly violent appearance in particular in Islamic West-Asia's frontier zones and peripheries. Urbanized households of sultans, princes, courtiers and their personal bodyguards, women, children, servants and administrators were another, heavily structured format, occupying the other extreme on this continuum of core relationships of power.¹⁹ In the devolved, segmented and negotiated realities of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia, most relational power constellations wavered in dynamic ways between these two extremes of social complexity. As suggested above, only a handful of these constellations attained and maintained a high level of organizational complexity, transforming with varying levels of success into the region's central courts in Cairo, Constantinople, Tabriz, Herat and Samarkand.

Throughout Islamic West-Asia, scribes (Ar. *katib*, pl. *kuttab*) of various provenance and expertise were hired to perform duties of tax collection, of household and military expenditure, and of letter writing in Arabic and Persian (and, increasingly, Turkish) for these diverse power constellations. Whenever, and wherever, the scale of a patron's power required it, specialization and diversification generated, or regenerated, more complex administrations. This process involved the structuration of larger sets of scribes and their different tasks following the ancient bureaucratic unit of the *diwan* and along hierarchies topped by traditional positions such as that of the vizier (Ar. *wazir*) or its Persian or Turko-Mongol equivalents. Similar processes affected the military entourages

19 Crossley, "Military Patronage and Hodgson's Genealogy of State Centralization in Early Modern Eurasia", pp. 105–108.

of West-Asia's rulers and leaders, with each patron having in their service fighters of various provenance and expertise ranging from tribal levies over mercenaries to military slaves and freedmen, and from horsemen to footmen. The occasional expansion of these fighters' ranks also led these services to specialize, diversify and subscribe to structural military precedents, including that of hierarchies of commanders known as *amirs* (in Arabic and Persian) or *begs* (in Turkish). In the course of the fifteenth century, as will be detailed below, this process of growing organizational complexity marked the history of Ottoman, 'Turkish' and Timurid leaderships and their courts in Western Anatolia, Egypt and Eastern Iran. It also happened to a certain extent in the entourages of other powerful leaders in the more unstable and peripheral frontier zone that connected Eastern Anatolia, Iraq and Azerbaijan.

In Egypt, as elsewhere in West-Asia, this process of bureaucratic specialization and diversification had actually been ongoing with ups and downs for several centuries. Following long-standing regional traditions of Arabic writing on epistolary and accountancy practices, this process' trajectory during the fifteenth century, in the service of the 'Turkish' Sultanate, was captured and reproduced in a handful of very detailed and informative literary texts. Describing the rules and regulations of the Sultanate's court and power apparatus, these books were written by scribes as manuals and as instruments both of the Sultanate's bureaucratic practice and of that practice's structural coherence across time and space. In these literary repositories of fifteenth-century protocol and epistolary modelling the Sultanate's apparatus actually appears as far from light. Indeed, these texts rather portray a powerful and coherent bureaucratic structure set up to penetrate and organize local power relationships as efficiently as possible. This impressive contemporary appearance has substantially informed many modern imaginations about the Sultanate, painting a picture of a highly rationalized bureaucratic state, organized and performed along a neatly devised triple hierarchy of 'the men of the sword, the men of the pen and the men of the turbans'. In modern scholarship, these contemporary categories are generally referred to as the 'military-executive', the 'financial-secretarial', and the 'judiciary office holders' of 'the Mamluk government'.²⁰ Furthermore, in modern Ottoman studies there is an equally widespread tradition to understand the Ottoman Sultanate in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a similarly intrusive bureaucratic state. This mainly followed from the fact that from the early sixteenth century onwards, this state began to leave an impressive paper trail not just in comparable manuals and administrative

20 Popper, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans*, pp. 90–110.

repositories, but also in uniquely preserved archival records. In fact, variations of this bureaucratic type of state appeared for a long time as a norm in modern scholarship that could be used to understand, evaluate and compare political organizations across fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia, especially in Egypt and West Anatolia and to some extent also in Timurid Khurasan, as more or less successful prequels of the region's early modern empires.

As will be detailed in the next chapter, since the early 1990s some scholars are also pointing to the pitfalls of teleology and anachronism in argumentations such as these, and alternative interpretations of the actual nature and meaning of bureaucratic practice and of bureaucratization in a context of Turko-Mongol politics are gradually being formulated. Considering the violent, volatile and personalized nature of those politics across the region, including in fifteenth-century Egypt, current scholarship is now certainly also contemplating the possibility that administrative texts and political realities could be two very different things. Indeed, the former texts may well have been one of the tools available to scribes and to their patrons to pursue more stable participation in, and control over, the fluidity of the latter realities in the face of continuous challenges. This approach tallies not just much better with what is known about fifteenth-century Turko-Mongol politics, but also with data from many other contemporary sources which points to the often incoherent and *ad hoc* nature of bureaucratic practice and also hints at the rather more limited success of central bureaucracy's penetration of local communities across fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. As suggested by the competitive nature of Turko-Mongol organizational arrangements, the structural integration of elites in centralizing sets of relationships was frequently contested, and the integration of diverse local and regional administrative practices and actors in centralizing claims to authority remained a haphazard enterprise. Wherever in Islamic West-Asia the scale of a leadership's power enabled administrative and military specialization and diversification, physical and political distance nonetheless continued to define, and confine, the extent of a locality's bureaucratic penetration by the center and its organizational arrangements. Just as with the politics of fiscal administration, the administration of central authority in this wider sense also continuously intersected and competed with all kinds of local, alternative or rival authority arrangements. The combination of a need for costly investments of people and resources to face these challenges, alongside the infrastructural limitations of surveillance and communication, and also the volatility of Turko-Mongol politics and the recurrent recalibration of central powers in fifteenth-century West-Asia, all meant that substantial distances continued to separate political actors. All this reflects above all a historical reality of socio-political segmentation and of local continuity and

empowerment that was not easy to integrate into, let alone control with centralizing bureaucratic arrangements, ambitions and apparatuses.

In fact, as suggested by Manz' archipelago metaphor above, West-Asia's integration into the orbits of its main political centers in the fifteenth century remained a contested and diverse reality which often involved the *ad hoc* action of military agents and local representatives. Irrespective of West-Asia's diverse ecological systems, administrative penetration and integration were therefore primarily limited to the main urban centers and towns and their hinterlands and to the upholding of interrelated, but also locally accommodated, urban systems of taxation and justice. This urban prioritization can be seen most forcefully in the concentration of military and administrative representatives and agents of central courts, as governors, commanders, judges, scribes and tax collectors, in many of the urban centers and towns of Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Iran, Khurasan and Transoxiana. As explained before, this presence had a mixed impact on local relationships of power, depending on distances and loyalties, on central investments of expensive resources, and on all kinds of different local complexities. Wherever any urban penetration was achieved, however, the core business of any political apparatus was to focus on tapping into local resource flows via fiscal and other arrangements, the maintenance of social order to assure the steady flow of those resources, and at best also some local performance of the central court's claims to sovereignty and political order.

Any assessment of the nature of this central penetration of local relationships of power is complicated by not just the structuring bias of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish administrative textbooks, but also the general paucity of documentary and non-urban sources for the political history of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, however, another important set of bureaucratic texts emerged in Aq Qoyunlu and Ottoman contexts. These texts confirm in many ways this rather narrow bureaucratic focus on local urban systems of taxation and justice as outlined above. The sources in question are the interrelated Law Books (*Kanun Name*) of Uzun Hasan and of the Ottoman sultan Bayezid.²¹ As Ottomanist Rhoads Murphey explains for the latter case, these and a related handful of surviving documents and texts confirm indeed that

it was from the narrow base of the more closely regulated urban space and urban markets that the Ottomans launched their first and most effective efforts aimed at modifying undesired market tendencies such as

²¹ Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650*, pp. 244–251; Woods, *The Aq Qoyunlu*, pp. 108–109.

hoarding and price speculation, and at creating the basis for a fair balance between mercantile profit and affordability for average urban consumers.²²

These Law Books integrated various local customary arrangements, complementing more general doctrinal regulations and legal advice formulated by specialists of religious law who tended to operate within alternative authority frameworks. As such, these Law Books announced comprehensive regulatory codification projects of later Ottoman sultans, but certainly did not mirror them. They actually pursued a more active central participation in particular local social, commercial and fiscal arrangements and solutions by proscribing and regulating the agency of the ruler's own local agents and representatives. The production of these specimens of royal codification towards the end of the fifteenth century are therefore above all rare extant functions of the growth, specialization and diversification of the entourages of Uzun Hasan and Bayezid as these were trying to organize the expanding horizons of these rulers' power.

In this way these Law Books actually only represent one particular moment in the formation and empowerment of such entourages and political apparatuses. Similarly formalized communication between courts and their agents in the form of decrees, orders, diplomas, missives, letters and reports—most of which have not been preserved—were integral to bureaucratic expansion throughout fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia, performing political authority as much as negotiating it. Other equally important aspects of this growth and expansion included all kinds of regulatory efforts, including the maintenance of social order and the ensuring of justice, related both to fifteenth-century West-Asian rulers' symbolic apparatus as well as the daily performance of their claims to sovereignty and resources and therefore often recorded in contemporary narrative texts of history. Modern scholarship has even made the convincing case regarding the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate that the ruler and his bureaucratic agents managed to appropriate legal and judicial authorities traditionally only invested in more autonomous specialists of religious law.²³ This remarkable expansion of the authority of the sultan of Cairo and of his bureaucratic apparatus appears not to have been achieved by any other ruler in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. Nevertheless, many certainly also deployed, or

22 Murphey, "The Ottoman Economy in the early imperial age", pp. 28–30, esp. 28.

23 Rapoport, "Royal Justice and Religious Law".

pursued, similar strategies of growth, penetration and judicial empowerment in their own, more or less successful, ways.²⁴

3 Situating Trajectories of State Formation in Islamic West-Asia

In the wide range of predominantly urban bureaucratic practices, fifteenth-century leaders and their agents generally seem to have prioritized concerns for power and control over any expectations about the performance of government and of specific administrative tasks.²⁵ This prioritization involved first and foremost the power, control and level of local or regional participation of the leader or ruler in whose service an administrative and military apparatus operated. However, in many, if not all, cases it also involved the power and control that could be acquired by the bureaucrats themselves, and that could be wielded by scribes, by military commanders and by all kinds of other agents in the leader's service. Closeness and direct service to the ruler in varieties of advisory, financial, military, diplomatic, ceremonial or other capacities were certainly one strategic means by which an agent could acquire power and control, indeed this was a very important tool amidst the returning realities of Turko-Mongol personalized politics. But in certain political contexts, these capacities could also be transformed into power and control in other, more autonomous, and therefore also more structural ways. Whenever the scale of a leadership's political reach in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia enabled bureaucratic specialization and diversification, this also generated a lengthening of the virtual chains of authority and agency between a ruler and the increasing numbers of agents performing his rule. From these agents' perspective, with greater complexity thus also came a relative depersonalization of the ties that bound them to their ruler. This was accompanied by the transformation of the ruler from a mere powerful person into a more abstract idea and representation of correct political order. This form of state formation therefore brought

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- 24 See Burak, "The Second Formation of Islamic Law", for a wider, comparative consideration of the relationship between Turko-Mongol dynasts and Islamic law in the late medieval and early modern period, suggesting that "different dynasties' adopting a particular Islamic school of law as their official state school [...] [represented] active attempts by the ruling dynasty to regulate the school's structures, authorities, and doctrines" (p. 580) and that at least in the Ottoman case this process of expansion of dynastic authority began in the early fifteenth century and is especially notable from the sixteenth century onwards.
- 25 Miura, "Administrative Networks in the Mamluk Period"; see also Chapter Two in this volume, especially "Introduction: Defining the 'state' between Max Weber, 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, and Charles Tilly".

greater autonomy for those along the chain who were trained, skilled and experienced in the maintenance, reproduction and expansion of that order, resulting in a remarkably symbiotic interaction between an agent's own empowerment and that of the leadership he served.²⁶

As suggested before, this classic state formation process of the mutual empowerment of a bureaucratic apparatus and of a centralizing political order topped by a particular leadership emerged especially in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia in the Ottoman Northwest, the 'Turkish' Southwest, the Timurid East and eventually also the Turkmen North. In each of these particular leadership contexts it did so only in qualified and circumscribed ways, as trans-regionally competing (and hence also co-constitutive) phenomena that were predominantly urban-centered realities and that were continuously challenged, intersected and renegotiated. Furthermore, the different leaderships of the more peripheral frontier zone in between these stabilizing political spaces also experienced an overlapping variety of more and less parallel moments of symbiotic empowerment. In all regions, military successes and expansions led by Turko-Mongol leaderships certainly generated some form of bureaucratic growth, diversification, specialization and state formation. In many cases, however, the same kinds of ongoing military action could also easily thwart this process of central or regional consolidation, and cause its regular regression to more personalized and contested relationships of power.

Having considered the general contours of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia's politics, its power elites and its Turko-Mongol practices and institutions, let us now turn to a more specific interpretation of these patterns of state formation and transformation, in particular of the dynamics that appear to have defined these patterns throughout this long century in the Ottoman, Syro-Egyptian and Timurid-Turkmen contexts. The main historical dynamics that will be discussed here reflect convergences of key features of West-Asian state formation that distinguish the fifteenth century while at the same time marking its trans-dynastic entanglement. These include the contingency of centralizing longevity, the integration of distant power elites through multivalent processes of bureaucratic growth, the specificity of elite renewal by outsiders to West-Asian political realities, and the reproduction of central bureaucratic elites in highly competitive as well as parallel and continuous ways.

3.1 *The Politics of Longevity*

In the Ottoman, 'Turkish' and Timurid-Turkmen contexts, one of the main factors that tended to check the fragmentation of power constellations so typical

26 Van Steenberghe, Wing & D'hulster, "The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate?"

of Turko-Mongol politics was the contingency of an easily forgotten phenomenon that will be named 'centralizing longevity' here. Fully in line with the nature of Turko-Mongol politics, it actually was a personalized type of centralizing longevity that seems to have generated almost paradoxically more depersonalized processes of bureaucratic diversification, specialization and state formation in most of fifteenth-century West-Asia's political centers. This type concerned the longevity of personal rule, when a ruler's military and political successes were long-lasting, over time generating the appearance of his reign as pertaining to a natural order of things. This longevity of personal rule created a charismatic political authority that somehow transcended and contained recurrent warfare and fragmentation while at the same time stimulating bureaucratic growth and state formation. Between 1421 and 1512 the Ottoman Sultanate was led by just three powerful rulers, who each reigned successively for some thirty years: Murad (r. 1421–44, 1446–51), his son Mehmed (r. 1444–46, 1451–81) and his grandson Bayezid (r. 1481–1512). This remarkable continuity of leadership was certainly one of several factors that facilitated a more or less persistent symbiotic interaction between these rulers' empowerment and that of new groups from their expanding, diversifying and specializing entourages. There occurred similar continuities and processes of symbiotic interaction, gradual empowerment and bureaucratic growth in Timurid contexts, especially during the long reigns of Shah Rukh (r. 1409/1416–47) and then of Sultan-Abu Sa'ïd (r. 1451/1459–69) and Sultan-Husayn Bayqara (r. 1469–1506) in the East. To certain extents, these multivalent phenomena of Turko-Mongol state formation eventually also accompanied various other Turkmen experiences of long, successful and expanding personal rule, such as with the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahan Shah (r. 1439–67), with his Aq Qoyunlu successor Uzun Hasan (r. 1457–78) or with the Karamanid Ibrahim Beg (r. ca. 1423–64). The fifteenth century in Islamic West Asia was thus certainly an era marked by both a remarkable set of long reigns and a variety of processes of state formation at the same time. Unlike in the Ottoman case, however, Turkmen, Karamanid and even Timurid forms of state formation in West-Asia's frontier zone never entirely managed to contain the detrimental effects of Turko-Mongol politics. The persistence of bureaucratic staff and practices certainly ensured some forms of stability, continuity and state formation in the face of the violent dynastic transitions from Shah Rukh to Sultan-Abu Sa'ïd and then Sultan-Husayn or to Jahan Shah and then Uzun Hasan in Iran and Azerbaijan, and from Karamanid to Ottoman sovereignty in Southern Anatolia. Nevertheless, such transitions after the disappearance of strong leaders were also always marked by the radical fragmentation, subordination or even annihilation of Timurid, Turkmen or Karamanid political authorities and power elites.

In contrast, this never happened in any similarly destructive ways within the Ottoman dynasty or for the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate in the fifteenth century, at least not after the first years of the century. Following Temür's violent passages, these years had in both cases indeed been marked by a similarly radical loss of political authority, central control and coherence. In Cairo a kind of centripetal institutional force actually enabled the containment and then, throughout the fifteenth century, the stabilization and structuration of this recurrent centrifugal dynamic in the format of the Sultanate's own successful trajectory of state formation. In the course of their long careers of military service, resource building (including through *waqf*-ization) and political leadership, the aforementioned successive sets of fifteenth-century state actors in Cairo decided successions to the sultanate and could even themselves rise to that position. As such they were both the products and the performers of that trajectory of continued bureaucratic growth, centripetal empowerment and political structuration, as Kristof D'hulster also suggests in Chapter 3 of this volume. At the same time the Sultanate's political elites, including these actors, continued to face regular and violent fragmentation in the context of succession struggles and other variants of Turko-Mongol internecine warfare. Unlike what happened among their Timurid or Turkmen peers, however, between 1412 and 1517 this never had any similarly destabilizing effects in the Sultanate on its territorial or socio-political coherence. This remarkable situation of bureaucratic growth and state formation in the face of endemic political violence and conflict in many ways was both a result and also a contributing factor of a kind of institutional inertia. This inertia was above all informed by the institutional longevity of the Sultanate in Cairo, which was unique, at least for fifteenth-century West-Asia. The Sultanate in Cairo originated with the Muslim championships of Saladin in the later twelfth and of a handful of *mamlūk* sultans in the thirteenth centuries and, as a site of trans-regional power, arguably even with their predecessors in Cairo since the tenth century. It was this institutional longevity and subsequent inertia that stimulated, irrespective of any divergent realities, the reproduction of the coherent, timeless and natural appearance of the Sultanate's political order in the aforementioned administrative texts as well as in all kinds of other contemporary imaginations and performances.

Nowhere else in post-Temür Islamic West-Asia were there any similarly longstanding and awe-inspiring continuities in Muslim sites, institutions, values and resources of power that could be claimed to complement and consolidate recurrent moments of personal centralizing longevity and its structuring effects on relationships of power. Nevertheless, all the fifteenth century's Turko-Mongol leaderships regularly, and successfully, appealed to ideas of institutional continuity with local or regional Turko-Mongol, Perso-Islamic and

other precedents. However, in the Ottoman case only the returning instability of Turko-Mongol political practices was also contained by another form of institutional longevity, contributing to a specifically Ottoman trajectory of state formation. This trajectory arguably only really took off when, after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, another powerful type of centripetal institutional inertia started contributing to the effects of many years of successful Ottoman leadership. For sultan Mehmed and his successors, the ancient imperial metropolis of Constantinople, with its wide-ranging appeal to political, cultural and socio-economic imaginations on an incomparable Eurasian scale, soon proved a structuring site of power that rivaled Cairo's role, both as a stabilizing centripetal factor within the Sultanate and a valuable regional metropolis at the pinnacle of Islamic West-Asia's hierarchies of power. Ottoman political authority continued to face ongoing disruptive political challenges, such as the threat posed between 1481 and 1495 by sultan Bayezid's brother, the refugee contestant for the throne Jem Sultan, or the struggle for succession between Bayezid's sons Korkud, Ahmed and Selim between 1511 and 1512. Yet during all this time, the Ottoman political order and its expanding number of agents, proved more than capable of securing the appearance of coherent political continuity and of avoiding the fate of Timurids, Karamanids or of many other Turkmen dynasties.

3.2 *The Politics of Distant Integration*

Whether cut short by the disruptive realities of Turko-Mongol politics or sufficiently embedded through different types of longevity to survive any such disruptions, there were various trajectories of state formation that made a marked contribution to the political landscape of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. Above all, these trajectories with their differing institutional qualities and quantities brought various levels of political autonomy to those involved in the region's complex chains of authority and agency, including to all kinds of non Turko-Mongol and non-military elites. In many areas of West-Asia, state formation thus offered a channel to integrate, in more than merely coercive ways, extant local political, administrative and military elites and elite arrangements into the expanding order of a successful center of Turko-Mongol power. It is all too easy to forget this phenomenon of the distant, occasionally resource-intensive and violent, and mutually-empowering integration of local leaderships into the bureaucratic apparatus of fifteenth-century West-Asia's more successful political orders. These different local elites and the politics of their political integration are equally important aspects of the trajectories of state formation in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. It is therefore relevant to consider them here in some more detail too.

As mentioned before the process of political structuration through bureaucratic growth engaged various urban elites in particular within expanding power relations of a centripetal and simultaneously locally accommodated nature. From Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt and Gaza, Jerusalem, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Tripoli and Aleppo in Syria, and from Bursa, Iznik, Sinop, Konya, Ankara, Amasya, Sivas, Kayseri and Amid in Anatolia and Tabriz, Mosul, Baghdad and Basra in Azerbaijan and Iraq, to Isfahan, Yazd, Shiraz, Kerman, Herat, Samarkand and Bukhara in the regions of Iran, Khurasan and Transoxiana, West-Asia's diverse and fragmented urban realities were not only dominated by interrelated and competing local and regional social formations and their overlapping varieties of kinship, communal identity and professional specialization. The arenas of intense social interaction which gave birth to these and many more urban centers and towns in West-Asia's ancient urban networks were also shaped by more or less successful attempts at urban participation through bureaucratic expansion and integration by various, often competing, Turko-Mongol power centers.²⁷ Again, the urban penetration of these centers in this manner was extremely diverse and multivalent across time and space, defined by physical and social distances as well as by sliding scales of Turko-Mongol power and success. Moreover, even where that penetration was most successful, not all urban groups were necessarily touched by it in the same way, and not all local urban elites, including Coptic accountants in Egypt, administrative experts from various sectarian communities in Syria, Anatolia and Iraq, or Persianate scribes and scholars across West-Asia, were necessarily similarly transformed into bureaucratic agents of a political center's interests. However, as also suggested by Patrick Wing's and Georg Christ's case studies of different merchant families and communities in Part 3 of this volume, many local actors went through an integrative process such as that of state formation and thereby became more deeply involved in the era's expanding political orders. Some certainly also became active shareholders in those political orders, as upholders of longstanding specialist solutions at the same time as being local or even regional political leaders.

Parallel to these urban technocrats and notables, Islamic West-Asia's rural and tribal elites were also in one or another way affected by the fifteenth century's trajectories of state formation. Actually, along the many, constantly changing, fringes of the century's intricate political orders many figures, including all kinds of Arab, Turkmen and other tribal leaderships and marshers

27 Lantschner, "Fragmented Cities in the Later Middle Ages".

lords, chose to be integrated into the bureaucratic apparatus of a political center in order to both contribute to the idea of the trans-regional expansion of that center's political order and to generate local distinctions through the social power of trans-local titles, paraphernalia and connections. Military service in particular continued to generate power in all trajectories of state formation, but the wider the distance separating these local military agents from the expanding political center, the more symbolic any obligations related to that service were, and the more local and centrifugal their power was. The atomistic, segmented and fickle realities of power relationships across fifteenth-century West-Asia, and the urban bias present in the more successful trajectories of state formation meant that such political distances with (semi-)nomadic leaderships in particular remained substantial. As a result, local instrumentalizations of any form of integration into the bureaucratic growth of regional centers—including also various arrangements that favored new leaderships, or new parties within extant leaderships—often prevailed over any more centripetal dynamic and over any form of bureaucratic penetration. Across the board such penetration was at times still considered necessary, particularly in *ad hoc* contexts of disputes over taxation and tribute, in the face of safety issues concerning the circulation of goods and people, and when there were changes to the perceived balance of trans-regional powers. In these cases, penetration mostly happened in the format of diplomatic exchanges and punitive expeditions which aimed to restore the local appreciation of a center's coercive power and to recalibrate its troubled relations with local elites. However, these exchanges and expeditions always represented occasional, temporary and expensive investments of financial and human resources in the intensification of particular sets of political relationships, and as such these missions and expeditions into West-Asia's diverse rural and nomadic areas always remained hazardous enterprises, at best generating only uneven and transient outcomes. Sometimes they even contributed to the empowerment of new local groups and individuals, and often carried within them the seeds of subsequent expeditions. Throughout the century and the region, they never gave way easily to more systematic reductions of political distances or to wider structural forms of integration in the state apparatus.²⁸

28 For examples of this phenomenon, see Wing, "Submission, Defiance, and the Rules of Politics"; Garcin, "Note sur les rapports entre bédouins et fallahs". On these atomistic and also distant power relationships across fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia, see furthermore the (very different) local examples engaged with in Binbaş, "Did the Hurufis Mint Coins?" (for the Anatolian region of Erzincan) and in Walker, "The 'Disappearing' Villages of Late Medieval Jordan" (for the Transjordanian region in Southern Syria).

This type of distant, occasionally resource-intensive and violent, and mutually empowering integration of local leaderships into the bureaucratic apparatus of fifteenth-century West-Asia's more successful political orders was decisive for political relationships above all in the poly-centric zone that stretched from Azerbaijan and Iraq to Anatolia. It marked the unsteady political relationships that connected many petty lords and rulers in this more peripheral zone to the competing trans-regional trajectories of Ottoman, 'Turkish' and Timurid state formation. As John Meloy reminds us in his contribution to Part 3 of this volume, this was also true for the elites of the Hijaz on the Arabian peninsula, controlling the sacred centers of Mecca and Medina both in the name of the Sultan of Cairo and as powerful but contested patrons of local communities.²⁹ In the second half of the fifteenth century, the Timurid disappearance in Western Iran and the trans-regional empowerment of Jahan Shah Qara Qoyunlu and then Uzun Ḥasan Aq Qoyunlu, obviously re-oriented many relationships. Nevertheless, Eastern Anatolia in particular remained a genuine frontier zone, where trans-regional authorities were disputed, where political distances appeared as substantial, and where ambitions to stabilize or even structure political relationships continued to be resource-intensive and hazardous enterprises. Important moments here include the decisive victory of the Ottoman sultan Mehmed over Uzun Ḥasan in 1473 at the battle of Bashkent in the Anatolian East and the Ottoman conquest of the Karamanid capital of Konya in the South in 1468. These would prove key moments for the particular transformation towards a more structural Ottoman penetration of Anatolian power relationships.³⁰ Nevertheless, Karamanids, their local tribal supporters, Aq Qoyunlu followers and many other Anatolian groups continued to challenge and subvert that penetration after the end of the fifteenth century, as did competitors for trans-regional authority from Cairo and Tabriz. In fact, the hugely expensive and mostly ineffective military confrontations between 1485 and 1491 in Southern Anatolia between the troops of Mehmed's successor Bayezid and those of the Sultan of Cairo, Qaytbay, were very much an illustration, a product and a confirmation of those Anatolian frontier conditions.³¹ In many ways, therefore, throughout the fifteenth century the disputed politics of local state formation and distant integration persisted in Southern and Eastern Anatolia, as they did in the regions of Iraq, Iran and Azerbaijan, at least until the beginning of Turkmen trans-regional empowerment with Jahan Shah Qara Qoyunlu.

29 See also Meloy, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade*.

30 Yıldız, "Razing Gevele and Fortifying Konya".

31 Har-El, *Struggle for domination in the Middle East*.

Closer to West-Asia's main centers of political power, especially in non-urban contexts the political distances from local leaderships often equally remained substantial. This could be due to geographical circumstances hindering easy access to a nearby region or to the Turko-Mongol practice of regular political fragmentation obstructing stable relationships with local power elites, amongst other possible more local variables. In all of these contexts of wider social distance, various forms of these particular politics of distant integration also persevered in Western Anatolia, in Syria and Egypt, in Azerbaijan and in Eastern Iran and Transoxiana, despite the more successful trajectories of state formation in operation in and beyond those regions. Arab and Turkmen Bedouin, Anatolian tribal and rural associations, Iranian mountain dwellers and many more groups participated actively in local and, occasionally, regional politics. Across Islamic West-Asia, and across these different social formations, these politically relevant groups and people also included trans-local communities of scholars, mystics and their followers in largely unprecedented ways, with people often rallying around charismatic religious leaders and driven by heterodox and occultist ideas and apocalyptic fervor.³² The actions of these groups had great political relevance on the local or even regional scale, and throughout the fifteenth century they therefore often informed central reports that either marked these groups as brigands and outlaws, as loyal state agents, or as both. These groups' political actions often indeed countered or subverted state formation trajectories, causing endless conflicts and disputes. Alternatively, such conflicts were equally often instigated by the different expectations and opportunities raised by the fiction of any attempts at these groups' distant integration into such trajectories. Besides such efforts, mainly in the form of diplomatic exchanges, at mutually beneficial integration into the military and administrative apparatus, central powers mostly resorted to costly punitive expeditions as their main mechanism for resolving these recurrent tensions with Bedouin and other nomadic and rural interests, or dealing with subversive

32 Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*. Binbaş actually argues that substantial diachronic change defined the space for political participation for networks of intellectuals, scholars and men of religion in the course of the fifteenth century, suggesting on the one hand that the state formation processes in the Ottoman Northwest and Timurid East of West-Asia in particular integrated such loosely defined networks more effectively from the mid-century onwards. On the other hand Binbaş believes that those same processes simultaneously empowered more complexly organized networks of Sufi masters and followers as active partners and agents and eventually as rivals, with the Safawiyya Sufi brotherhood and their Eastern-Anatolian Turkmen supporters transforming into the Safavid imperial polity.

ideas and claims. Even in the more directly administered environments of the Ottoman Northwest, the ‘Turkish’ Southwest, the Turkmen North and the Timurid East, most attempts at more structural integration and control still quickly proved too resource-intensive to maintain for any states in formation during this time. It was only in the Ottoman North that this mutually constitutive wavering between an accommodated and a violent integration of local, centrifugal power relationships sometimes acquired a more structured outlook. This phenomenon was apparent in the practice of moving certain, subversive, Anatolian populations and social groups to new regions, especially across the Bosphorus. There, as local outsiders, their fortunes were more intimately linked to that of the trajectory of the Ottoman state in their new roles as economic and military agents of that state. This Ottoman practice of collective resettlement (*sürgün*), achieved through a combination of violent coercion and the award of economic privileges, manifested itself most famously between 1468 and 1473 in the repopulation of the new capital of Constantinople with people from the South-Anatolian Karamanid lands. A powerful tool in the particular trajectory of Ottoman state formation, however, in the fifteenth century it remained simply an *ad hoc* solution to particular problems of distant integration just like any other that was available to the Ottoman sultans, and to their West-Asian peers.

3.3 *The Politics of Central Elite Renewal: mamluks, kul, and Turks*

Islamic West-Asia’s multivalent trajectories of Turko-Mongol state formation generated multiple new opportunities not only for the empowerment of ancient or distant local groups and elites. These trajectories also interacted along mutually defining pathways with all kinds of other social formations of more recent stock and specialization, similarly complementing or even joining the ranks of the Turko-Mongol leaderships of the post-Temür era at the very cores of its political centers. The complete integration of political, military and even social outsiders as new power elites was nothing new in the histories of Islamic West-Asia. However, as will become clear below, in the fifteenth century this happened with a variety, range and to an extent which were quite unprecedented, and therefore deserving of separate discussion, if only for the way they further illustrate the particular trajectories of Islamic West-Asian state formation.

In the final quarter of the fourteenth century, Temür’s enterprise sought to use a politics of endless conquest to create a new trans-regional West-Asian power elite composed of his family and of his comrades-in-arms, most of whom stemmed from minor leaderships in the Chagatai nomadic conglomerate of Central Asia. This radical social transformation thus generated the nucleus of

the fifteenth century's Timurid leaderships.³³ Temür was continuing long-standing practices accompanying the establishment of new Turko-Mongol leaderships, and his achievement in replacing more traditional, structured power relationships with entirely new, personalized ones was, as explained before, regularly repeated across West-Asia as part of Turko-Mongol tainistry and appanage practices. In Timurid and Turkmen contexts, however, these regular shifts never entirely repeated Temür's exploit of the creation of a radically new central elite at the turn of the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. The East's political centers of Tabriz, Shiraz, Herat and Samarkand continued to be dominated by Temür's military elite of Turko-Mongol powerholders as well as their Turkmen peers of more traditional leadership origins. This happened above all in an uneasy, mutually restrictive interaction with the particular trajectories of state formation that developed around long-reigning successful rulers such as Shah Rukh, Sultan-Abu Sa'id, Jahan Shah, Uzun Hasan, and Sultan-Husayn. Regularly partaking in the expanding political and military apparatuses around these rulers and their courts, these military elites were collectively identified as one exclusive political community of 'Turks', even though their ranks remained divided by violent competition and internecine warfare, and by political action undermining and disrupting as much as supporting those trajectories of state formation. There were regular endeavors to introduce fuller integration or even the marginalization of these centrifugal 'Turkish' military elites but these attempts at strengthening particular central state formation trajectories were never entirely successful in disciplining the era's Turko-Mongol tide of devolved authority and recurrent fragmentation. As a result, from Temür's time onwards, Timurid, Turkmen and Turko-Mongol military leaders, families and lineages continued to hold on to their access to authority, power and income across these regions, pursuing interests that never easily aligned with those of their sovereigns, and continuously negotiating balances of power that everywhere checked the political autonomy of these 'Turkish' amirs as well as of Timurid and Turkmen rulers and princes.

In the contexts of the Ottoman and 'Turkish' Sultanates, on the contrary, feats similar to Temür's creation of a new elite appeared in more systematic ways than ever before, and can arguably even be seen as important functions of these Sultanates' particular trajectories of state formation. The historical trajectory that, in modern scholarship, tends to be most intimately connected with this notion of a socio-political reproduction through the repeated re-creation of Turko-Mongol elites is that of the Sultanate of Cairo in Egypt and Syria, today also known for this reason as the Mamluk Sultanate. For centuries the personal armies and warbands of rulers and leaders in Egypt and Syria had

33 Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*.

been constructed around the skills and capacities of hardened horsemen. Most of these horsemen were brought to the region in unfree (*mamluk*) conditions via commercially vibrant commodity chains especially from Inner Asia's steppes and the Caucasus, to be subsequently prepared for military and political service in their new master's entourage. Throughout this long period, but especially since the mid-thirteenth century, many individuals originating as *mamluks* managed to acquire local or regional power and leadership, building up their own armies of *mamluks*, and occasionally even attaining the sultanate. As mentioned before, in the post-Temür fifteenth century amirs and sultans with diverse *mamluk* origins emerged more consistently than ever before as actors and agents of the Sultanate's state. Collectively identified in contemporary communication as both Circassians (*Jarakisa*) and Turks (*Atrak*) at the same time, almost all of these sultans and amirs had been among the tens of thousands of *mamluks* who, throughout the century, were sold in Egypt, re-educated as Sunni Muslims, trained as Turko-Mongol horsemen, accustomed to speaking Qipchaq Turkic, and accommodated to Turkic patterns of martial behavior. New groups of these Turkified Circassians regularly rejuvenated the ranks of a sultan's personal troops in particular, to strengthen his military capacities, to counterbalance those of his *mamluk* military commanders, the amirs, and to expand the pool of military experts available for him to rely on and to favor in return with rank, status and income. The Sultanate's political elites of 'Turkish' amirs therefore all shared similar individual histories of mostly (non-Turkish and non-Muslim) Caucasian origins, juvenile enslavement and transfer, long years of royal military and court service and of resource building, and endless competition for status and income with regular batches of new royal favorites of similar backgrounds. In fact, in this process of highly competitive social reproduction amidst the expansion of the sultan's bureaucratic apparatus and the lengthening of its chains of authority and command, not just particular sets of *mamluk* amirs-courtiers, but also groups of the sultan's *mamluk* rank-and-file in Cairo appear to have acquired more political autonomy than ever before. In any case, the unruly behavior in Cairo's urban spaces of the more recent royal imports (*julban*) among them is a well-known, even notorious, problem of the Sultanate's fifteenth-century history. Through a combination of coercive action and anticipation of immediate material rewards, they were often a deciding factor in successions to the sultanate as well as the extent to which the reigns of sultans in this century were marked by the presence or absence of central stability and prosperity.³⁴ In general, however, all of these developments aligned the identities, interests and conflicts of sultans, amirs and their personal entourages of family, followers and

34 Levanoni, "Rank-and-File Mamluks versus amirs".

mamluks, in intimately centripetal ways with the political order that had given them their new lives of power, precedence and opportunity.

Unlike in previous centuries in Syro-Egypt, and unlike elsewhere in Islamic West-Asia, that political order of the fifteenth-century Sultanate of Cairo acquired a highly meritocratic, socially transcendent and increasingly ideational flavor. The reason for this is that, amidst the realities of Turko-Mongol taniatric politics, recurring attempts to again make it a dynastic order like in preceding centuries never succeeded. This is also illustrated in the short-lived case of al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1496–98), son and successor of al-Ashraf Qaytbay (r. 1468–96), presented in Albrecht Fuess' discussion of this sultan's dynastic endeavors in Chapter 4 of this volume. In contrast, the expanding bureaucratic apparatus, the military and political experts who manned this apparatus, and the flows of human and financial resources that supported them, endured, even if only in tense and conflict-ridden ways. A remarkable factor that illustrates this non-dynastic trajectory of Syro-Egyptian state formation through the fifteenth century concerns the transformation of the position of sultan itself into a bureaucratic prize to be won, and lost, by the highest bidder. Such a qualification needs to be weighed against the achievements, longevity and subsequent empowering royalty of sultans such as al-Ashraf Barsbay (r. 1422–38), al-Zahir Jaqmaq (r. 1438–53), al-Ashraf Qaytbay (r. 1468–96) and Qanṣawh (r. 1501–16). However, as mentioned before, in most cases, including those of the latter four sultans, the embattled accessions to the sultanate tended to crown long careers of military and court service and of resource accumulation in the royal shadows of peers. Apparently, it took a long time to acquire the main political and financial competences necessary for gathering (and keeping) the support of royal *mamluks* and amirs-courtiers. Many sultans in the fifteenth century had enjoyed long default careers in the state apparatus meaning that most of them only managed to accede to the sultanate at a fairly advanced age. Whereas Barsbay, in 1422, had been in his forties, his successor Jaqmaq was in his sixties when he succeeded to the throne in 1438. Al-Ashraf Inal (r. 1453–61), like his two predecessors, was originally a talented horseman and Circassian *mamluk* brought to Egypt from the Caucasus in the 1390s. When he succeeded Jaqmaq, he was 73 and for him, this succession brought to a glorious close his long and eventful career of leadership as a military commander, as a governor in various Syrian towns and cities, and as an entrepreneur-courtier in Cairo. Similar stories of humble origins, service and empowerment have survived about most of Inal's successors, belonging to new, younger generations of *mamluk* state actors. Al-Zahir Khushqadam (r. 1461–7) and Qaytbay were in their fifties when they became sultan, and just like the unsuccessful septuagenarian al-Zahir Yalbay (r. 1467) and his equally unfortunate successor

al-Zahir Timurbughā (r. 1467–68) they all had been brought to Egypt and Turkified in the 1420s and 1430s before embarking upon long and conflict-ridden careers of military, administrative and court leadership. Finally, in the 1490s a third generation of veteran military bureaucrats graduated into competent candidates for sultanic office, all originating as new *mamluks* in Egypt in the 1450s and 1460s, and including Qansawh, who was in his sixties when he ascended the throne in 1501 and who infamously died of a stroke in 1516 on a battlefield in Northern Syria, appalled by the victorious onslaught of the Ottoman sultan Selim.³⁵

The absence of dynastic reproduction, and the regular competitive but coherent self-renewal of the Turko-Circassian political community more generally, seem unique for the ‘Turkish’ Sultanate’s trajectory of state formation in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. Nevertheless, the contemporaneous Ottoman Sultanate, which was obviously entirely constructed around the successful reproduction of the Ottoman dynasty, also experimented intensely with centripetal strategies of elite renewal that had a lot in common with those of the Southern Sultanate’s. Here too, complete outsiders were transformed into central state actors through a system of total re-socialization and centralizing entanglement. In fact, upon closer inspection even the Ottoman dynasty itself was a product, and a telling illustration, of this gradual construction of a new, specifically Ottoman, political community. The sultans Murad (r. 1421–44, 1446–51), Mehmed (r. 1444–46, 1451–81) and Bayezid (r. 1481–1512) were all born from unfree women, selected and brought to the Ottoman court as royal concubines for the sole purpose of the royal lineage’s successful reproduction. Only sultan Selim (r. 1512–20) was an exception to this rule, as the product of a marriage between Bayezid and the daughter of the Dulkadirid ruler of Elbistan in Southeast Anatolia. The latter, however, only represented an acute late-fifteenth-century moment in the Sultanate’s politics of distant integration, whereas the former cases were all part of a complementary, expanding practice of internal renewal and total integration. This was gradually generating a novel elite, even within the Ottoman royal household, gathering various sets of state actors whose competences and fortunes were intimately connected with the maintenance of the Ottoman dynastic order, and with the expansion of the apparatus that performed this order.

As Dimitri Kastritsis explains in great detail in Chapter 5, when he writes about the doomed fate of the Çandarlı family of traditional Ottoman bureaucrats, this integrative reproduction of the Sultanate’s political community

35 Levanoni, “The Sultan’s *Laqab*”, esp. p. 82.

through substantial renewal was anything but a straightforward and uncontested process. Like in the case of the Sultanate of Cairo the performance of this elite reproduction through the military and political prioritization of unfree dynastic agents (*kapikulari*) of varying expertise, gender and outsider origins was rooted in longstanding local and regional customs. Basically, the Ottoman solution to the perennial problem of the continuous need for loyal manpower appeared above all in the format of the so-called 'new army' (*yeniçeri*), a personal bodyguard entirely made up of trained footmen selected from the ranks of the sultan's unfree servants (*kul*). The precise historical trajectory of this Janissary corps, of similar central regiments of loyal and seasoned fighters, and of the *kapikulari* more in general, are forever lost in the mists of *hindsight* narratives explaining the origins and nature of Ottoman success.³⁶ Whereas these phenomena had emerged and settled in already before the Sultanate's near destruction in the wake of Temür's victory in 1402, they only really started appearing as a dominant practice of Ottoman elite renewal in the mid-century reign of Mehmed II. At that time, they became more than ever a function of, and a contributing factor to, the Ottoman trajectory of state formation and of the expansion, specialization and symbiotic empowerment of the dynasty and its agents alike.

By the mid-fifteenth century at the latest, the Janissary corps of unfree footmen and similar central military regiments, all directly rewarded for their service by their master, the sultan, were not just providing regularly renewed Ottoman manpower. As *kul* whose destiny was directly dependent upon that of their master's, the sultan, they also balanced the power and interests of the Sultanate's traditional elites in important, centripetal ways. These included a wide range of military commanders, mostly belonging to ancient Turkish and Anatolian families of cavalymen (*sipahi*) and spread all across the core Ottoman territories, as *timar*-holders with their own troops of horsemen, along separate hierarchies of power, status and resources. The substantial expansion of the Janissary corps under Mehmed, who managed to double its size to about 10,000 members by the 1470s, thus both represented and enabled a decisive shift in this traditional balance of military power to the sultan's benefit. As part of the Ottoman trajectory of state formation, however, this expansion also went hand in hand with the growth of the Janissaries' own political autonomy at the center of the Ottoman political order. With its ranks continuously being replenished from the *kul* and with its size steadily maintained at mid-century level, the Janissary corps acquired a reputation not just for causing havoc and turmoil at moments of political instability, but also for thus becoming a powerful actor

36 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 112–113.

at such moments, and one whose actions and choices left many marks on the Ottoman political order, without ever challenging that order. In the context of the tanistric succession struggles of the 1440s, the 1480s, and above all the 1500s, Janissary violence and anticipation of rewards proved a factor to be reckoned with, and their actions eventually even decided the accession of Selim (r. 1512–20) to the top of the Sultanate's political order.³⁷

The *kul's* transformative role in the expansion and empowerment of the Ottoman state apparatus in the fifteenth century also played out at other, more individual, levels of elite participation and reproduction. In fact, the gradual diversification and specialization of the bureaucratic apparatus were also replicated within the burgeoning ranks of the sultan's unfree servants. Many of these *kul* came to be selected and trained for non-military duties, entering the service of the sultan's household and its expanding administration. In due course, particularly starting from the mid-century reign of Mehmed, several of these courtier-bureaucrats with *kul* origins even succeeded in becoming members of the sultan's leading advisory council, the imperial *divan*, or in obtaining the post of grand vizier, chairing the *divan* and acting as the most powerful Ottoman bureaucrat after the sultan. This remarkable wider employment and empowerment of individual *kul* at the sultan's court again provided for important centripetal checks and balances on the power and expertise of traditional Ottoman elites. This peculiar aspect of Ottoman bureaucratic growth and state formation gradually, often violently, and mostly haphazardly pushed these ancient Turkish and Anatolian families (including that of the Çandarlı) away from the center of Ottoman power. The Ottoman trajectory of state formation therefore eventually manifested itself in, and was indeed pursued by, the emergence of a very different, very Ottoman, political leadership. Consisting in increasingly exclusive ways of royal unfree or freed servants, this new political elite came to be dominated by regularly rejuvenated sets of military, administrative and court experts. These people were specifically selected and trained for the single purpose of service to a more and more abstract idea of Ottoman political order, and rose in the ranks of the expanding apparatus to positions of Ottoman authority and power through a combination of bureaucratic competence, royal favor and the elimination of competitors.

The expanding membership of the *kapikulari* thus gradually moved their field of action from serving in the sultan's personal entourage to having a significant impact within, and upon, the military, administrative and political apparatus of the Ottoman political order. This new Ottoman leadership of *kul* bureaucrats saw its ranks regularly replenished from particular sources of

37 Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650*, p. 258.

manpower that continued to ensure that all *kul* began their military or administrative careers more or less as newcomers to that political order. Many of the unfree who were selected to enter the sultan's palace for further specialist training and education did so as prisoners of war, captured during the endless military campaigns, especially against non-Muslim adversaries. Some also continued to enter via the commodity chains and specialist markets that connected the many corners of Islamic West-Asia in general with the wider world and that provided most of the power elites between Constantinople, Cairo and Samarkand with high-quality household and other staff. War and commerce were, however, expensive, resource-intensive and hazardous enterprises, and were not an easy way to provide for a steady supply of manpower to meet any growing demands. Unlike the 'Turkish' Sultanate in the Southwest the Ottoman leaderships managed to overcome this predicament and to complement the common but rather vulnerable dependence on production centers and commodity chains beyond a political center's direct reach and control. They turned to new, more internal, resources for elite renewal, and thus established more structured flows of manpower. In fact, in the Ottoman context this happened by tweaking—first on *ad hoc* bases but increasingly also along more regulated lines—particular tax farming and tributary arrangements with non-Muslim communities in a practical direction that could meet the continuous Ottoman need for manpower. These more specific arrangements became known as the Ottoman practice of 'collection' (*devşirme*). They entailed that from every forty households in Christian communities in regions such as Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia or Anatolia, one boy aged between 8 and 18 years was to be hand-picked as part of the payment of the Ottoman levy imposed on these communities and sent to the sultan's agents in Bursa, Edirne or Constantinople for allocation to the Janissary corps. If the boy was endowed with exceptional qualities he was sent to the palace and given several years' training for military or palace service, until he would be recruited to fill a vacancy in the corps or at the palace and start a career of bureaucratic service and, potentially, leadership in the expanding military, administrative or political apparatus of the Ottoman political order.

Whatever the violent, commercial or tributary arrangements that transformed these *kul* into unfree servants of the Ottoman sultan, they all obviously were entering the Ottoman household and, increasingly even becoming members of the Ottoman political community from backgrounds which were extremely diverse ethnically, socio-economically and culturally. Just like the Turkified *mamluks* in the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate, the aim of the preparation of these newcomers for Ottoman service was first and foremost to transform them into a more uniform community of loyal Muslim subjects of their master,

the sultan. Albanians, Greeks and many others who were thus integrated into the center of power were all forced to convert to Islam. They had to learn to communicate in the Ottoman variant of the Turkic language, to conform to Ottoman Turkish values and rules of behavior, and to nurture social bonds with peers and with other Ottoman agents. In general, the idea was to make them 'Turkified' and allow them to become full partners and stakeholders in the dynasty's own, regularly replenished, elite social formation of the new 'Ottomans' (*Osmanlı*). Metin Kunt summarizes as follows the early modern outcome of this process of the genesis of an entirely new Turko-Ottoman political community and identity:

By the mid-sixteenth century the Ottoman military-administrative elite was made up of these new Turkish-speaking Muslim officers who called themselves not Turkish but 'Roman' or 'Ottoman'; it was in this sense that Ottoman writers could comment that the 'Ottomans' took the best qualities of many nations and blended them to a new, superior race [...]. The Ottoman dynasty, too, was as much a product of this new blend as their servitors. From the beginnings of the family of Osman, the beys made marriage alliances with neighbouring Byzantine or Serbian princesses. Later the sultans chose not to continue such marriages but sired their sons and daughters with harem favourites of various ethnic backgrounds brought up in the palace. The language of the dynasty as well as of the polity remained Turkish, but not, strictly speaking, as a mother tongue.³⁸

Half a century earlier, at the turn of the fifteenth century, the boundaries of the Ottoman political community were not yet so exclusively delineated by the *kapikulari* and their distinctive Turko-Ottoman identity. Nevertheless, as explained above, they certainly formed an increasingly formidable factor among the Sultanate's central power elites, as they and their expertise, action and relationships infiltrated, monopolized and reproduced the expanding tentacles of the Ottoman political order in (and beyond) the Northwestern corner of West-Asia. In this capacity they displayed many obvious parallels and connections with the contemporaneous hegemony of the Turko-Circassian community of *mamluk* bureaucrat-leaders in the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate. Even the social reproduction of these fifteenth-century *mamluk* bureaucrat-leaders and of their *kul* peers and contemporaries was largely bound by similar practices and conventions. The increasingly distinctive *kapikulari* status at this time remained the exclusive domain of *kul* of non-Muslim origins who owed their

38 Kunt, "Ottomans and Safavids", pp. 197–199 (quote p. 199).

new lives, identities and careers entirely to their master, the sultan. For this reason, until at least the 1510s the many members of the Janissary corps were even prohibited from marrying and producing offspring. As the chains of authority and command were lengthening in the course of the Sultanate's process of state formation, selection for, access to, and management of the *kapikulari* was also increasingly administered and controlled by *kul* bureaucrats rather than by the sultan himself or any other courtier of more traditional stock. There was thus a growing, self-fulfilling bias at the Ottoman center in relation to the expanding ranks, expertise and relationships of the *kul*, even regarding the management of their own renewal. This meant that bureaucratic power amassed by an Ottoman military or court leader was increasingly only transmitted on the basis of bureaucratic competence, favor and patronage, and success in the endless competition with peers and others, and not on the basis of kinship or lineage.

Several of the long careers in Turkifying palace service, bureaucratic specialization and, eventually, Ottoman leadership and authority during the long reigns of sultans Mehmed and Bayezid represent a strong illustration of, and defining factor in, the Ottoman trajectory of state formation and of the mutual empowerment of the *kapikulari* and of their master, the sultan. These careers also demonstrate how the politics whereby the central elite was reproduced by substantial renewal from within the Sultanate's territorial boundaries enabled different kinds of remarkable continuity that intersected in successful ways with the politics of Ottoman integration. Out of the fifteen different individuals who occupied the court's leading position of grand vizier between the 1450s and the 1510s only three belonged to traditional Turkish families. All the other grand viziers in this period had Christian backgrounds, just like many other viziers, lower officials and commanders. They entered the Ottoman political order and embarked upon new, Ottoman, careers of authority and power as hand-picked *devşirme* levies mostly collected from rural communities in the Balkans or as prisoners-of-war captured in the ongoing confrontations with (former) Byzantine and Balkan elites. These various coercive arrangements thus simultaneously allowed some of the experts, expertise and relationships of power of its former Christian adversaries to be directly integrated into the center of Ottoman power. This was one distinctive outcome of the unique situation of the Ottoman Sultanate's substantial expansion into the Christian Balkans, and this remarkable phenomenon again empowered both the Sultan, providing him with a particular group of new loyal servants, and these new *kul*, including many of former Byzanto-Balkan noble stock who were now converted to Islam and Turkified. At the turn of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries many of the latter became leading members of the increasingly powerful

Turko-Ottoman political community and of the political order to which that community owed its very existence.³⁹ Very symbolically, and tellingly, they even had in their ranks at least two nephews of the last Byzantine emperor. Captured as young boys during the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, they were only known by their Muslim names and Turko-Ottoman titles as Mesih Pasha (d. 1501) and Has Murad Pasha (d. 1473). These boys eventually came to hold major positions of military and palace leadership, including the governorship of the Balkans (*beylerbey* of Rumeli) and the grand vizierate during the reigns of sultans Mehmed and Bayezid. They both seem to have done so without ever losing at least some appreciation for their imperial Byzantine origins.⁴⁰ Inspired by these and many similar cases from the latter half of the fifteenth century Karen Barkey, paraphrasing Heath Lowry, concludes with good reason that “after 1453, the Ottoman palace was packed with ‘Byzantine and Balkan aristocrats turned Vezirs’”.⁴¹

3.4 *The Politics of Central Elite Reproduction: Scholars, Scribes and Tajiks*

This remarkable transformation-*cum*-integration of the Ottoman Sultanate’s political community through an ever more internalized and automated process of renewal was quite unique for fifteenth-century West-Asia. This singularity manifested itself especially in this process’ successful marginalization of traditional Turkish and Anatolian elites and their more centrifugal interests, and also in the way it converged various local experts, expertise and relationships of power in the sultan’s expanding household, palace and political order. Elsewhere, reproduction of power and status among central elites happened in more diverse and multivalent ways, which require a separate discussion.

In the Sultanate of Cairo, the regular renewal of military-bureaucratic elites certainly paralleled that of the ‘Ottomans’ as a self-sustaining and centripetal practice. In the Sultanate’s case this determined the marginalization of dynastic trends even more, including in relation to access to the very top of its political order. At the same time, however, the Sultanate followed an entirely different path from that of the remarkable convergence of the Ottoman state formation trajectory in the *kapikulari*. In the latter Ottoman case the traditional bureaucratic distinctions between ‘the men of the swords’, ‘the men of the

39 Lowry, *The Early Ottoman state*, pp. 115–130 (“Chapter Seven: The Last Phase of Ottoman Syncretism—the subsumption of members of the Byzanto-Balkan aristocracy into the Ottoman ruling elite”).

40 Lowry, “A Note on three Palaiologon princes as members of the Ottoman ruling elite”.

41 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 80; Lowry, *The early Ottoman State*, p. 118.

pen' and 'the men of the turbans' certainly continued to inform the organization of the expanding state apparatus. However, the boundaries of the first two categories appeared as increasingly fluid in terms of people and relationships of power, especially in the wake of the expanding involvement and diversification of the Ottoman sultan's *kul*. In the Sultanate of Cairo, however, a more complex politics of central elite reproduction appears to have existed. This complemented, in equally centripetal ways, the construction of a Turko-Circassian political community. Unlike in the Ottoman case, in Cairo and elsewhere in the Sultanate those traditional boundaries of specialization and reproduction were constructed along alternative lines of functional and social distinction. There, *mamluks* generally—but not exclusively—held titles, positions, privileges and responsibilities of the first, military category while a mix of experts particularly with local Syro-Egyptian origins continued to manipulate the mechanisms of central taxation, remuneration, communication and justice that are traditionally ascribed to the second and third categories.

In fact, in fifteenth-century Cairo several of the latter experts became extremely wealthy bureaucratic leaders in their own right, controlling the court's flows of resources, its symbolic apparatus and related sets of court relationships in highly empowering ways. Most of these non-military competitors for power at the top of the Sultanate's political order actually came from a mere handful of families of administrators and scholars of (formerly) Christian or Muslim, and Syrian or Egyptian origins. After many years of engagement in local low-profile scholarship and scribal service, different members of these families had only entered Cairo's court and its expanding bureaucratic apparatus in the 1410s and 1420s, as a function of their employment in the pre-sultanic, amiral households of the sultans al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (r. 1412–21) and al-Ashraf Barsbay (r. 1422–38). Men (and women) from the most successful of these new bureaucratic elite families, such as the Banu al-Barizi from Ḥama, the Banu Muzhir from Damascus, and the Egyptian Coptic converts of the Banu Katib Jakam, continued to appear at court until the end of the Sultanate a century later. There, they would partake in the performance of its administrative, religious and sometimes even military apparatus, currying royal favor, gathering enormous wealth, and pursuing all kinds of relationships of power and expertise, including through royal, amiral and other highly political marriages. Dynastic tendencies therefore certainly determined the transmission of office and power within many of these families. Examples here include the Banu Katib Jakam, whose members held the top post of the supervision of the royal fisc (*nazr al-khass*) continuously between 1425 and 1458 and that of the army bureau (*nazr al-jaysh*) between 1466 and 1496, or the formerly Coptic Banu

l-Ji'an family, whose members were associated with the supervision of the treasury (*nazr al-khizana*) for about a century until 1501.⁴²

Nevertheless, despite this apparent trend towards dynastic reproduction, a more centralizing practice of competitive renewal simultaneously imposed itself. This practice was defined by factors of competence, favor, resources and their opposites, rather than simply by any rights or privileges of kinship or lineage. Such qualities and competences were obviously rooted in particular, administrative skills and successes, which created opportunities and opened many doors, and which were certainly easier to possess or acquire for these and many similar families' offspring than for any outsider. At the same time, however, just as with the Turko-Circassian community of royal *mamluks* and amirs, the acquisition of authority and leadership in the expanding state apparatus was a different matter from bureaucratic service. That acquisition instead had more to do with more generic qualities of entrepreneurship, charisma, distinction, brokerage and wealth. The ongoing growth of the Sultanate's apparatus therefore continuously created new opportunities for ambitious in- and outsiders, as well as providing all kinds of new arenas of fierce competition along the Sultanate's lengthening chains of authority and agency. As a result, at the pinnacle of the Sultanate's fifteenth century political order, sometimes not just families, but also individuals of lesser and diverse professional and social origins—such as the infamous Abu l-Khayr al-Naḥḥas ('the Copper-smith') (1412–59)—occasionally emerged as new bureaucratic leaders. When this happened, it was often much to the dismay and horror of their competitors of more traditional stock, and with important mitigating effects on the reproduction of power for any more consolidated group of administrators at court.⁴³

Even among scholars and scribes, therefore, hierarchies of central leadership were not easily reproduced, but rather continuously challenged and renewed in often conflict-ridden ways. Participation and advancement in these hierarchies depended on bureaucratic skills and precedents, but it was even more contingent on an individual's political and financial competences which they required for gathering (and keeping) the support of subordinates, peers and sovereigns. As a result, like the careers of sultans and amirs, those of some of the most prominent non-military leaders and courtiers of the Sultanate's

42 Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration dans l'état militaire mamlūk (IXe/XVe siècle)*.

43 Mortel, "The Decline of Mamlūk Civil Bureaucracy in the Fifteenth Century"; Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*.

fifteenth century history were also marked by many years of service and of accumulating political and financial resources—relationships, wealth and power. We might think of figures such as Jamal al-Din Yusuf b. Katib Jakam (1416–58), supervisor of the royal fisc (*nazir al-khass*) for five successive sultans (1437–58), Yahya al-Ashqar (d. 1469), major-domo (*ustadar*) for most of the period between 1440 and 1467, and Abu Bakr b. Muzhir (1428–88), the court's confidential secretary (*katib al-sirr*) at the head of the royal chancery from 1463 until his death in 1488. At the same time, however, in the absence of any real dynastic practices, the political opportunities and autonomy thus acquired by these and many more central bureaucrat-scholars and -scribes in the fifteenth-century Syro-Egyptian Sultanate remained highly conditional and volatile. Above all, they remained intimately connected to the bureaucratic roles that they managed to play, to the political and financial resources that those roles enabled them to tap into, and even to the conflicts over those roles and resources in which they continuously had to engage. Their career paths of service and leadership therefore continued to be tied up in centripetal ways with the maintenance and reproduction of the political order to which they mostly owed those careers. This was true even when on an individual or collective basis they were bound to prioritize their own rather than that order's empowerment.⁴⁴ The powerful leadership of many of these local bureaucrats, and the regular competitive renewal of their ranks, therefore remained an illustration, and function, of the Sultanate's particular, mutually empowering, trajectory of state formation, just like that was also true for its Turko-Circassian political community of amirs and sultans.

As mentioned above, unlike their Turko-Circassian and Turko-Ottoman counterparts the Timurid and Turkmen politico-military communities in the North and East remained much more fragmented and determined by the tanistic political and economic interests of 'Turkish' military leaders, families and lineages. These mostly owed their continued regional empowerment to Temür's construction of a new elite at the turn of the fourteenth century, and to its largely successful dynastic reproduction throughout the fifteenth century. At the same time, however, the highly contested trajectories of state formation that marked the reigns of Shah Rukh, Abu Sa'id, Jahan Shah, Uzun Hasan and Sultan Husayn did not just continue to have to engage in mutually restrictive ways with these 'Turkish' elites and the reproduction of their mainly centrifugal interests. These trajectories certainly also interacted closely with the reproduction of particular Persian scribal and scholarly elites and their practices and skills, both benefiting from this reproductive process and stimulating it in

44 Miura, "Administrative Networks in the Mamluk Period".

centripetal and political ways that remind one of the experiences of their peers in the Sultanate of Cairo. These elites were collectively identified as ‘Tajiks’ and employed as expert administrators managing the assets and interests of both ‘Turkish’ amirs and Timurid-Turkmen rulers across the region. Throughout the fifteenth century several individual members of these elites emerged from administrative service in these rulers’ households and palaces to bureaucratic leadership in their political orders. They were deeply involved, in mutually empowering ways, in the expansion, maintenance and reproduction of those orders, refining and controlling most of their mechanisms of central taxation, remuneration, communication and justice. In the process, these administrators accumulated substantial political and financial resources alongside relationships, wealth and power, from which their own families, friends and followers equally benefited.

As Beatrice Manz also explains in detail in her chapter on the political involvement of Iranian landed elites in Part 3 of this volume, quite a few such ‘Tajik’ leaders of Perso-Iranian origins thus became formidable political leaders in their own right, occasionally even engaging in military leadership and warfare with their own, personal troops. In these ways they managed to counter in significant and effective centripetal ways ‘Turkish’ competitors for central power and ‘Turkish’ challengers of that power and its political order. Among the most remarkable and powerful of these non-military leaders at the Timurid and Turkmen courts were undoubtedly Ghiyath al-Din Pir-Ahmad Khwafi (d. 1453), head of Shah Rukh’s finance office between 1417 and 1447 who later served at the courts of various other Timurid princes, and his son Majd al-Din Muhammad Khwafi, chief accountant at Sultan-Husayn’s court since its first installation in Herat in 1469, who was chief agent of the court’s centralizing trajectory of bureaucratic expansion and specialization. Eventually, in 1494, after many years of competition and confrontations with the court’s ‘Turkish’ memberships, Majd al-Din Muhammad was tortured, deprived of his allegedly fabulous wealth, and murdered.⁴⁵ These two careers, spanning almost a century of Timurid rulership in West-Asia’s East, represent a remarkable, personalized connection between these two distinct moments of Timurid state formation during the first half and final quarter of the fifteenth century respectively. In fact, connections such as these are anything but exceptional for political careers in the Timurid and Turkmen North and East, where the imperfect integration of ‘Turkish’ commanders and the balancing empowerment of ‘Tajik’ administrative experts represented practical realities that connected individuals, groups and institutions across all kinds of regularly shifting boundaries of loyalty, service and political

45 Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, pp. 79–99.

order.⁴⁶ The careers of Pir-Ahmad and his son Muhammad at various Timurid courts are therefore a powerful illustration of how in Islamic West-Asia's North and East state formation also appeared as one, regularly reproduced, process of political transformation, albeit along its own, distinctive trajectory of symbiosis and confrontation between fifteenth-century 'Turkish' and 'Tajik' political communities, and of the latter's reproduction and empowerment across Timurid and Turkmen (and occasionally also Ottoman) leaderships.

4 Epilogue: The Trajectories of Fifteenth-Century Boundaries and Ideals

It is well known that of these many distinct trajectories of Turko-Mongol state formation in Islamic West-Asia, the Ottoman was the only one that continued more or less unaltered, indeed in increasingly coherent ways, into the sixteenth century. Key factors in this process undoubtedly included military and administrative expansion, personal and institutional longevity, internalized elite renewal and the reproduction of the Ottoman Sultanate as an increasingly autonomous, integrative and empowering bureaucratic order. But another defining factor was certainly also the strength and tenacity of the era's other trajectories of state formation in the Southwest, North and East of West-Asia. For the Cairo Sultanate this manifested itself from the late 1510s onwards in the rapid local integration of Syro-Egyptian elites and practices into this Ottoman process, in the continuation of much of the Sultanate's political apparatus, now adapted to Ottoman political realities, and in the substantial recalibration of the latter realities to equally accommodate the definitive shift of the Ottoman political order towards the very center of the Muslim and Eurasian worlds. The latter shift, however, was a function not just of Ottoman expansion and appropriation of the Cairo Sultanate's apparatus and elites, but also of the particular continuation of the more ambiguous Timurid-Turkmen state formation route in Islamic West-Asia's East, in Uzbek Transoxiana and Mughal Northern India as well as in Safavid Iran. Making its appearance on the West-Asian stage at the turn of the new century, Shah Isma'il's (r. 1501–24) Safavid authority was personally, practically and institutionally in many ways one of the main heirs to this Timurid-Turkmen trajectory. At the same time, when that authority acquired a more coherent appearance in the course of the sixteenth century, this contributed to the emergence of new East-West frontiers that were also strongly

46 Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, pp. 106–110.

tied to the formation of the political, social and cultural order of the Safavids' early modern Ottoman counterpart.

That early modern Ottoman social order was actually described by Malcolm Yapp as "compartmentalized", and as

a block of flats in which the inhabitants only met in the corridors [...] [and in which] each compartment had its hierarchy and the leaders of those hierarchies transacted much business together [...] [I]t was the people who bridged the compartments, *qāḍīs* and notables, who made the system work.⁴⁷

This view certainly reminds one of above-mentioned statements about the segmented nature of Turko-Mongol politics and socio-economic organization in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. However, although the block of flats, with clearly defined compartments, corridors and inhabitants with clearly defined roles is attractive, it is not the most apt metaphor here, given the ongoing dynamics of expansion, fragmentation and circulation, recurrent attempts at political stabilization and administrative penetration, and, more generally, different trajectories of Turko-Mongol state formation. Even in the Ottoman North-West those dynamics, attempts and trajectories remained insufficiently fixed, structured or coherent to justify thinking of them in terms of clearly defined and delineated blocks, flats, compartments, corridors and roles. Nevertheless, some social phenomena in the foregoing survey may certainly be understood as multivalent compartments, autonomous corridor trafficking and multiple roles and hierarchies, even if they did appear only in very temporary, localized, premature or *ad hoc* formats, and in conditions of continuous negotiation, accommodation, contestation and experimentation. The metaphor therefore may still have some value, as it makes clear how old and new compartments continued to take shape and interact amidst the fluidity, volatility and incongruence of fifteenth-century West-Asian social order. At this time the skeleton of certain blocks of flats even became visible, although their construction remained very much creative work in progress, and although the more coherent early modern appearances of some of that work were all but predetermined. Above all, this imperfect yet insightful metaphor certainly helps one to remain aware of the impact of Turko-Mongol trajectories of state formation on these constructions of social order, not least also reminding us of the limits of that impact. Driven by coercive power and integrative ambitions these trajectories generated a productive centrality for rulers, elites and political

47 Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East*, pp. 9–10.

communities in those skeletons. At the same time, these trajectories emerged almost incidentally, and with differing rates of success, from multivalent actions that were above all about creating new compartments, about expanding, reorganizing and repositioning them, and about pursuing priority in the constantly changing corridors of compartmental relationships, rather than attempting to construct an entire block, monopolizing it and making “the system work”.

Yapp also suggested that due to the “compartmentalized nature” of early modern Ottoman social order, “the Muslim ideal of a stable society, based on justice and composed of the four classical pillars—bureaucrats, soldiers, merchants and artisans, and peasants—bore little relation to [...] reality [...]”.⁴⁸ Considering the differences between the “compartmentalized nature” of the early modern Ottoman order and that of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia, the latter fifteenth-century reality was even farther removed from that ancient ideal of one stable and just society. Nevertheless, the ideal was also very present across that reality’s unstable political landscape, perhaps even more actively than generally tends to be acknowledged. It informed widespread ideas about good rulership and legitimate socio-political order.⁴⁹ It permeated the aforementioned multiple pursuits to organize relationships of coercion and power along the labels of ‘the men of the sword, the men of the pen and the men of the turbans’ and through legislation and legal action. It finally also guided many dichotomous explanations of the era’s fluid and volatile roles and hierarchies, such as the binaries of ‘Turks’ and ‘Tajiks’, ‘Persians’ and ‘Arabs’, ‘elites’ (*khassa*) and ‘commoners’ (*amma*), tax payers and tax recipients, commanders and administrators, or Muslims and Christians. These and many similar ideas, labels, actions, binaries and explanations contributed to the many appearances of social order across West-Asia, amidst those complex realities of segmentation, fragmentation and competitive empowerment. Above all, they operated everywhere as highly fluid specimens of socio-cultural boundaries that were constantly crossed, challenged and reconfigured. In fact, the formulation of such boundaries with the aid of these and related ideas and explanations continued to represent important stakes in the endless negotiation, accommodation, contestation and experimentation from which both compartments and corridors emerged, stimulating communication across such compartmentalization and contributing to the appearance of larger skeletons and contours of order.

48 Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East*, p. 9.

49 Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East*, esp. pp. 113–118 (‘Post-Mongol Politics (1335–1506)’).

These fluid socio-cultural boundaries, and these ideas and ideals more in general, were always also highly political, constructing, and constructed by, all kinds of relationships of power across Islamic West-Asia. As such they were always also part of the ideologies of Turko-Mongol rule in fifteenth-century West-Asia, and of wider apparatuses of political communication and performance. Despite their importance for fifteenth-century West-Asia's diverse trajectories of state formation, these symbolic apparatuses have not been dealt with separately in this chapter. This is partly because that would go beyond the more socio-politically oriented focus of the current volume, but also because much pioneering work still remains to be done in this highly complex and intellectually sophisticated, but traditionally downgraded and even oft-neglected, domain.⁵⁰ Today these ideologies and discourses of power, and the highly intricate trans-regional webs of meaning-making and knowledge practices to which they pertain, are arguably even less well-known, studied and understood, in the more general entangled context of fifteenth-century Turko-Mongol state formation in particular, than Islamic West-Asia's power elites, its institutions and practices, and its socio-political transformations. Recent years have certainly seen a growing acknowledgement of the need for research into this field. Scholars are beginning to realize the potential value in investigating the nature and wide-ranging impact of the often very novel sets of ideas and ideals of legitimate rule and kingship that came to dominate West-Asian discourses of power with and after Temür. There is also a growing acknowledgement of the riches of this subject, and of the experimental creativity and the shared mix of memories, symbolic practices and cultural systems by which Turko-Mongol leaderships, Arabo-Persian courtiers and Muslim intellectuals of wide-ranging expertise and mobility engaged in legitimizing, explaining and disciplining the eclectic, violent and volatile political realities of the era. Models of leadership in West-Asia in the fifteenth century operationalized eclectic imaginations of social justice, divine favor, dynastic precedence, ideal rule, royal wisdom, millenarian sovereignty, charismatic sanctity and their like.

50 See especially Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* and Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. Despite the comprehensiveness suggested by these titles, these two authors generally prefer to neglect any detailed discussion of the later medieval period, due to their focus on the *imamate*. This was a religio-legal concept of Islamic sovereignty that appeared in the fifteenth century with substantially altered meanings that are difficult to comprehend from Watt's and Crone's strictly Arabo-Islamic genealogical perspective. See also Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought* (who tellingly decided to entitle his brief survey of important fifteenth-century thinkers such as Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Davānī and Faḏl Allāh Khunḡī-Iṣfahānī "The Decline of Classical Islamic Political Thought" [pp. 183–188]).

These highly creative symbolic apparatuses enabled very intense connections between the different courts of the era and their communicative systems, and also with their Perso-Islamic, Turko-Saljuq and Mongol-Chinggisid antecedents as well as with the ways their imperial successors made their impressive appearances on the early-modern Eurasian stage.⁵¹ It remains a daunting task to untangle the genealogies, the communications and performances, and the functions and agents of these eclectic imaginations, which are to be situated within the fields of theology, philosophy, mysticism, occultism, mathematics, historiography and various other premodern Eurasian knowledge traditions. At the same time, pursuing this is highly desirable, not least because as demonstrated above almost all of the, mostly narrative, extant sources for those trajectories of fifteenth-century state formation are in many ways products, and constituents, of those symbolic apparatuses. Even though it is a task that cannot be addressed in the current context, this certainly remains a highly relevant and very promising one that calls for further, preferably collaborative, initiatives along similar lines of West-Asian, and for that matter Eurasian, entangled research.

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51 See especially Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, pp. 100–120; Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 178–244; Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, pp. 31–41 (“The Making of a Messianic Age in Timūrid Iran and Central Asia”); Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, pp. 23–55 (“The Lord of Conjunction: Sacrality and Sovereignty in the Age of Timur”); Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*; Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism*; Van Steenbergen, *Caliphate and Kingship*, pp. 90–104; Melvin-Koushki, “Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy”; Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam*.

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Studying Rulers and States across Fifteenth-Century Western Eurasia

Jan Dumolyn and Jo Van Steenberghe

In this second chapter we seek to embed the preceding chapter as well as the other contributions to this volume within various interpretative traditions of state formation studies in order to determine a heuristic ground for better understanding the parallels, connections and divergences of fifteenth-century ‘statist’ appearances in the historiography of Islamic West-Asia, and of Western Eurasia more generally.¹ The main questions at stake are as follows: how have researchers operationalized concepts of ‘the state’, of its formation and of its transformation within the various historiographical traditions; what conscious or unconscious presuppositions and assumptions have driven this operationalization; and how has social theory been applied in this process in various ways. This discussion of some of the major conceptual debates on ‘the state’ in the study of fifteenth-century Western Eurasia will be pursued in a pragmatic way. It will be oriented towards identifying and explaining some of the most widely or most explicitly used models of state formation within different research traditions. The rationale here complements that of the first, empirical chapter in aiming to make fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia’s political history more accessible and intelligible to wider audiences while also inviting specialists of these different traditions to rethink what they know about their subjects within wider or unexplored frameworks.

More generally, pursuing these questions and purposes in this chapter enables us to further contextualize the different contributions to this volume’s Parts 2 and 3. We aim to make them more intelligible, in entangled and reflexive ways, as representatives of wider research traditions that continue to be

¹ This chapter has been finalized within the context of the project ‘The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate II: Historiography, Political Order and State Formation in Fifteenth-Century Egypt and Syria’ (UGent, 2017–21); this project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Consolidator Grant agreement No 681510).

dominated by what will be identified here as legalistic readings of ‘the state’. Moreover, this chapter also wishes to take stock of the various possibilities for genuine comparative research, across and beyond these traditions of Islamic West-Asian political history writing. Given the almost complete lack of any general ‘historical sociology’ of premodern state formation in Islamic West-Asia along with the relative paucity of theorizations of explicitly non-Western premodern state formation more generally, this chapter also wishes to enrich these fields of study with more precise analytical perspectives.² This includes foregrounding conceptual tools that may enhance the comparative potential on the Eurasian canvas of empirical historical research such as that which is presented in this volume.

After a general introduction presenting some of the main issues at stake in the long history of the theoretical study of the premodern state, the second part of this chapter briefly discusses the main trends in the substantial existing literature on state formation for late medieval and early modern Europe. The longer third part of the chapter then presents an in-depth survey of the different interpretative frameworks that have informed, and continue to inform, the study of rulers and states across fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. This part focuses in particular on how (early) Ottomanists, Turkmen and Timurid specialists, and Mamlukologists have thought about “the state” in their diverse yet interconnected research traditions. The chapter ends with some final observations and suggestions about the comparative value of extant models and analytical tools to study state formation.

2 For Islamic West-Asia, only a handful of theorizations in more specific studies come close to contributing to a historical sociology of ‘the state’ (often, however, without really engaging with each other’s ideas). See Paul, *Lokale und imperiale Herrschaft*; Paul, “Violence and State-Building in the Islamic East”; Paul, “The State and the Military—a Nomadic Perspective”; Lindholm, “Part III State and Society: Prophets, Caliphs, Sultans, and Tyrants”, in idem, *The Islamic Middle East*; Di Cosmo, “State Formation and Periodization in Inner Asian History”; Crone, “The Tribe and the State”; Donner, “The Formation of the Islamic State”; Lapidus, “Tribes and State Formation”; Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*; Clifford, *State Formation and the structure of politics*; Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the modern state*; Barkey, *Empire of Difference*. See below for a detailed assessment of the contributions by Marshall Hodgson, Ira Lapidus and Michael Chamberlain to this theorization. Furthermore, worth mentioning here are also the following attempts to at least marginalize dominant European models, “avoiding Eurocentrism and presentism” (Kiser & Levi, “Interpreting”, p. 557), in comparative engagements with (aspects of) premodern state formation: Monson & Scheidel, *Fiscal Regimes*; Bang & Scheidel, *Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East*; Morris & Scheidel, *Dynamics of Ancient Empires*.

1 Introduction: Defining ‘the state’ between Max Weber, ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun and Charles Tilly

1.1 *Defining What States ‘are’*

In a recent comprehensive survey article on modern scholarship’s diverse engagements with the study of the premodern state classicist Walter Scheidel noted how there are being used two distinct types of definition of what ‘the state’ is, and how it can or should be studied. On the one hand, Scheidel explains, there are those who formulate exclusive definitions that prioritize modern Western statist experiences. On the other hand, there are those who pursue inclusive definitions that are in favor of universal heuristic applicability across time and space.³ According to Scheidel, this analytical dichotomy is “emblematic of a more general rift between legalistic and political science approaches ... [and] approaches of history, anthropology, and sociology.”⁴ As we will argue below, this division has also characterized historiographical visions of the state and of its agency in late medieval Europe and fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. In fact, the exclusive determinism of ‘the modern state’ has for a long time had a substantial impact on these visions, and on their widely-shared organization around state/society binaries in particular. Especially in the study of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia this impact continues to leave many traces until today.

At the same time, from a comparative analytical perspective, it is also clear that across the board, the diverse definitions of ‘the state’ in modern scholarship all share a rootedness in Max Weber’s ideal type, with its emphasis on the combination of coercion, differentiation, a ruling apparatus and legitimate order:

A ‘ruling organization’ (Herrschaftsverband) shall be called a ‘*political organization*’ (*politischer Verband*) if and insofar as its existence and the effectiveness of its order (die Geltung seiner Ordnungen) within a specifiable geographical *area* are continuously safeguarded by the application and the threat of *physical coercion* (*physischen Zwangs*) on the part of the administrative staff (seitens des Verwaltungsstabes). A *continuously operating compulsory political organization* (ein politischer *Anstaltsbetrieb*) shall be called a *state* (*Staat*) if and insofar as its administrative staff successfully claims the *monopoly* of *legitimate physical coercion*

³ Scheidel, “Studying the State”, p. 8.

⁴ Scheidel, “Studying the State”, p. 8.

(das *Monopol legitimen* physischen Zwanges) in the implementation of its order (die Durchführung der Ordnungen).⁵

The diverse definitions in modern (Western) scholarship actually share not just Weberian roots, but also what Scheidel identifies as “a number of key features”. Reviewing seminal contributions to state formation debates by leading historians and sociologists such as Michael Mann, John Haldon and Charles Tilly,⁶ Scheidel concludes that all of the most widely accepted definitions point at the usefulness of identifying a power constellation as a ‘state’ if in one way or another it combines these three factors: “centralized institutions that impose rules, and back them up by force, over a territorially circumscribed population; a distinction between the rulers and the ruled; and an element of autonomy, stability, and differentiation”.⁷

To this triad of centralized coercive institutions, socio-political distinction and stabilizing political differentiation a fourth factor is very often added referring back to Weber’s insistence on the centrality of successful claims to order and legitimacy. Especially in the study of premodern or early states, this additional factor has also increasingly been acknowledged as an equally constitutive key feature for any definition of the ‘state’. This concerns the symbolic means that underscore the reality of the other three factors and that bind rulers and ruled into the shared imagination of an integrated, even natural, political whole. Byzantinist John Haldon and political scientist Jack Goldstone, in their own neo-Marxist exploration of a statist definition, stress the importance of this factor of “ideological integration”, which in their view often appears in the format of “the ‘ritual penetration’ of a society as represented by specific

5 This is Walter Scheidel’s translation of Max Weber’s definition (the italics are Weber’s), explaining that “the conventionally quoted English translation in Weber 1978, 55 is imprecise” (Scheidel, “Studying the State”, p. 5). Weber’s German terminology has been added here to Scheidel’s translation to underscore the value of his translation, and to convey the subtleties of Weber’s definition (from Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 29). This translation is repeated, as a “very precise” one, in Hall, “Varieties of State Experience”, p. 61.

6 Mann: “The state is a differentiated set of institutions and personnel embodying centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate outward to cover a territorially demarcated area, over which it claims a monopoly of binding and permanent rule-making, backed up by physical violence” (Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, 1: 37); Haldon: “the state represents a set of institutions and personnel, concentrated spatially at a single point, and exerting authority over a territorially distinct area” (Haldon, *The State*, pp. 32–33); Tilly: “Let us define states as coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories” (Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, p. 1).

7 Scheidell, “Studying the State”, p. 7.

sets of social practices that express the legitimacy and belief system underpinning elite and central authority and that generally express and reinforce the structure of social relations of production". Haldon and Goldstone explain that ideological integration and ritual penetration actually allow states to survive even when those key features of centralization, distinction or differentiation are under pressure.⁸ Many years before Haldon and Goldstone, Joseph Strayer, one of the pioneers of European state formation studies, had made this point even more forcefully when he explained that "a state exists chiefly in the hearts and minds of its people; if they do not believe it is there, no logical exercise will bring it to life".⁹ The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in one of the most compelling contributions to theories of the state and its formation, formulates similar insights, famously explaining and formulating the addition of this symbolic feature of ideological integration, ritual penetration and collective imagination as an explicit elaboration of the traditional Weberian definition.

I would say, using a variation around Max Weber's famous formula, that the state is an X (to be determined) which successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical and *symbolic* violence over a definitive territory and over the totality of the corresponding population. If the state is able to exert symbolic violence, it is because it incarnates itself simultaneously in objectivity, in the form of specific organizational structures and mechanisms, and in subjectivity in the form of mental structures and categories of perception and thought. By realizing itself in social structures and in the mental structures adapted to them, the instituted institution makes us forget that it issues out of a long series of acts of *institution* (in the active sense) and hence has all the appearances of the *natural*.¹⁰

Following Bourdieu, it indeed seems important for any definition of the state to also acknowledge that states are the incarnation of a mutually constitutive

8 Goldstone and Haldon, "Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation", pp. 10–15, esp. 13.

9 Strayer, *Medieval Origins*, p. 5.

10 Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State", pp. 3–4 (italics from the original) (see also Bourdieu, *On the State*, p. 4). In this context of *symbolic* violence and "ritual politics" as key features of statist definitions we should also refer to the contributions to this debate made by the neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci, especially in the format of his thinking with the notion of 'hegemony' (Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*; Bates, "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony"), and by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, especially in his *Negara: the theatre state in nineteenth-century Bali*, where he (in)famously argued that "power served pomp, not pomp power" (p. 13).

combination of a hegemonic discourse and of an apparatus of coercion, distinction and differentiation. As such, states display a tendency to appear as natural or even meta-historical forms of political organization, which is however no more than a function of their existential claims to legitimacy and to any self-defined form of statehood. Rather than merely being as they thus appear, states are always in the process of becoming, in an endless “series of acts of institution”. “[S]tates are never ‘formed’ once and for all”, as George Steinmetz explains in his exploration of the study of the state-culture nexus. “It is more fruitful to view state-formation as the ongoing process of structural change and not as a one-time event”.¹¹ In any definition or attempt at analysis, therefore, what matters most is this process of a state’s endless formation, and transformation, as that incarnation of a mutually constitutive combination of a hegemonic discourse and of an apparatus of coercion, distinction and differentiation.

1.2 *Defining How States ‘become’*

For Bourdieu, and for many like him, this endless act of state formation happens simultaneously in the “objectivity” of social structures and in the “subjectivity” of mental structures. Often, this is thought to happen in a dialectic interaction between power structures, or between varying combinations of such structures and all kinds of non-state phenomena.¹² In many cases more specific moments in this process of formation are identified and defined, mostly as heuristic tools for analytical purposes rather than as actual stages in any teleological trajectory. In this respect, Goldstone and Haldon speak of a “line from local state to supra-local state to empire (and back again)”.¹³ More specifically, they explain how

At one extreme of socio-political organization, the term “state” can refer to a relatively short-lived grouping of tribal or clan communities united under a warlord or chieftain who is endowed with both symbolic and military authority—in anthropological terms, a “Big-man” confederacy. [...] At the other extreme we find more or less territorially unified political entities, with an organizational “center” (which may be peripatetic) from which a ruler or ruling group exercises political authority and that maintains its existence successfully over several generations; a key

¹¹ Steinmetz, “Introduction”, p. 9.

¹² See e.g. Mann’s notion of a ‘dialectics of empire’ generating “a long-term developmental tendency” (Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, 1:161).

¹³ Goldstone & Haldon, “Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation”, p. 6.

element in the formation and degree of permanence of such formations is that the authority of the ruler or ruling group is recognized as both legitimate and exclusive.¹⁴

In Goldstone and Haldon's very wide-ranging historical model, state formation between these extremes is not simply a contingent function of dialectic interaction between power structures, but "a longer-term evolutionary process in which social habits and institutions and state organizations respond to changing conditions through [...] 'competitive selection' of practices".¹⁵ In this evolutionary process towards social transcendence and autonomy and towards a high degree of political integration and permanence, Goldstone and Haldon describe how "the potential for state formations to reproduce themselves" appears as a central feature.¹⁶ In this respect, they reformulate Bourdieu's idea of "the instituted institution" in historically and materially more concrete terms, which arguably represent some of the main heuristic parameters that are currently used in historical state formation studies:

The state becomes a specialized and dominant set of institutions, which may even undertake the creation *ab initio* of its own administrative personnel and that can survive only by maintaining control over the appropriation and distribution of surplus wealth that this specialized personnel administers.¹⁷

Goldstone and Haldon's analytical model of an evolutionary process shifting back and forth between two extremes appears here perhaps most clearly as deeply rooted in a Marxist interpretation of modes of production.¹⁸ At the same time, they also explicitly acknowledge their indebtedness to other traditions. These included the ideas formulated by the fourteenth century North-African scholar 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406),¹⁹ who famously described the process of social formation from a nomadic chieftaincy to a

14 Goldstone & Haldon, "Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation", pp. 5–6.

15 Goldstone & Haldon, "Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation", p. 7. This argument follows Runciman, *Treatise*.

16 Goldstone & Haldon, "Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation", p. 8.

17 Goldstone & Haldon, "Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation", p. 8. This mainly follows Mann, *Sources of Social Power, volume 1* (see also below).

18 For a brief critique of neo-Marxist notions of state formation, see Steinmetz, "Introduction", pp. 14–15 (focusing in particular on "Gramsci's writings on hegemony" and "Anderson's historical studies of antiquity, feudalism, and absolutism").

19 Goldstone & Haldon, "Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation", p. 7.

bureaucratic-administrative power constellation as a highly competitive iterative one, determined chiefly by social identities and relationships, economic structures, urbanization and cultural production and consumption. For Ibn Khaldun, nomadic formations are most powerful in social terms, but economically they remain relatively weak; their inevitable military empowerment is therefore bound to target economic empowerment as well, both of which materialize best in urban contexts of defense, accumulation, differentiation and distinction. However, the impact of the latter processes, including on social power, is transformative for the ruling constellation of the 'state' (*al-dawla*). Over time this 'state' becomes entirely dependent on new administrative personnel for its maintenance of control and authority, and at the same time is bound to collapse under the pressure of a new nomadic formation and its fresh social power.²⁰

This tradition of imagining the endless act of state formation in a naturally occurring iterative succession of different forms of political organization actually has its equivalents in Mediterranean antiquity. It appears most explicitly in Book 6 of *The Histories* by the second century BCE Greek historian and politician Polybius of Megalopolis (ca. 200–118 BCE). Polybius explains how there are three forms of political organization (*politeias*)—kingship (*basileias*), aristocracy and democracy—and how time and again each of these three forms degenerates into its lesser equivalent—tyranny, oligarchy and mob-rule (*okhlokratia*)—, just as a living organism experiences birth, rise, decay and death. For Polybius the latter natural experience of life also marks the succession of these forms, with mob-rule eventually giving way to the chaos out of which a new strongman will rise as monarch, and the cycle of political organization (*politeiōn anakyklosis*) restarts.²¹ Ibn Khaldun's and Polybius' thinking about state formation appears as very different, also demonstrating how they operated and embedded their theories in very different political contexts and concepts—fourteenth-century CE nomadic power and Islamic urban efflorescence in North-Africa and West-Asia for the former, Greek integration into the freshly won Roman domination of the second-century BCE Mediterranean world for the latter. On a more abstract level Ibn Khaldun's and Polybius' modellings nevertheless also have many features in common, from their iterative logics and firm beliefs in the degenerating nature of power to their assumptions about the naturally increasing complexity of political organization and

20 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*; Martinez-Gros, *Ibn Khaldūn*.

21 Polybius, *The Histories*, Volume III, book VI (II. On the Forms of States), pp. 294/5–318/9; Polybius. *The Histories*, p. xix.

their conceptions of that organization's active, even reproductive, integration of ever more stakeholders.²²

Another seminal tradition to which Goldstone and Haldon explicitly refer as a source of inspiration—"Weber's concept"—brings us back to the opening paragraphs of this chapter's introduction, to the Weberian tradition.²³ It is well known that Weber identified "three pure types of legitimate authority" (*drei rein-er Typen legitimer Herrschaft*), which in many ways also remind us of Polybius', and for that matter Ibn Khaldun's, modellings. In line with Weber's aforementioned definition of a state as "a political organization [that] [...] successfully claims the *monopoly* of *legitimate* physical coercion in the implementation of its order", these three analytical types differ along the fundamentally different rational, traditional or charismatic "grounds" (*Charakters*) on which they successfully make those claims, famously giving way to "legal authority" (*legale Herrschaft*), to "traditional authority" (*traditionale Herrschaft*) or to "charismatic authority" (*charismatische Herrschaft*) respectively. Weber usefully summarizes the socio-cultural essence of each of these three types as follows:

In the case of legal authority, obedience is owed to the legally established *impersonal order* (*der legal gesetzten sachlichen unpersönlichen Ordnung*). It extends to *the persons exercising the authority of office* under it (*durch sie bestimmten Vorgesetzten*) by virtue of the formal legality of their commands and only within the scope of authority of the office (*kraft formaler Legalität seiner Anordnungen und in deren Umkreis*). In the case of traditional authority, obedience is owed to the *person* of the *chief* who occupies the traditionally sanctioned position of authority and who is (within its sphere) bound by tradition (*der Person des durch Tradition berufenen und an die Tradition [in deren Bereich] gebundenen Herrn*). But here the obligation of obedience is a matter of personal loyalty within the area of accustomed obligations (*kraft Pietät im Umkreis des Gewohnten*). In the case of charismatic authority, it is the charismatically qualified *leader* (*dem charismatisch qualifizierten Führer*) as such who is obeyed by virtue of personal trust in his revelation, his heroism or his exemplary qualities so far as they fall within the scope of the individual's belief in his charisma (*im Umkreis der Geltung des Glaubens an dieses sein Charisma*).²⁴

22 See also Duindam, "Dynasty and Elites", pp. 2–3.

23 Goldstone & Haldon, "Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation", p. 7.

24 Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 124; translation from Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 216.

Weber basically conceptualizes political transformation as a process of rationalization from personal to impersonal forms of political organization, towards the ideal type of legal authority “and its typical expression in *bureaucracy*” (*seinen spezifischen Typus in der ‘Bürokratie’*), and away from the charismatic and traditional types, the latter “typically represented by *patriarchalism*” (*im ‘Patriarchalismus’ typisch repräsentiert*).²⁵ In premodern times, however, the charismatic and, especially, the traditional types always remained predominant for Weber, especially in patriarchalism’s more complex manifestation in patrimonialism (*Patrimonialismus*), representing an expansion and semi-bureaucratization of the ruler’s personal power, and at the same time “a decentralization of the household [...] [which] leads inevitably to an attenuation of full patriarchal power (*führt unvermeidlich zu einer inneren Abschwächung der vollen Hausgewalt*)”.²⁶ As will also transpire from the survey below, this typology of charismatic, traditional and legal power has arguably been as influential in modern, especially historical, studies of that endless act of state formation, as Weber’s aforementioned definition of the state has been. A case in point, especially for West-Asian historiography, is Karl Wittfogel’s much debated and largely outdated model of ‘oriental despotism’. In its alleged historical manifestation in the format of Asian ‘hydraulic empires’ this highly influential modeling was obviously informed by Marx’s historical materialism and his conceptualization of an ‘Asiatic mode of production.’²⁷ In its imagination of the organization of discretionary personal power, however, it was rather more akin to the “extreme case” (*im Höchstmaß der Herrengewalt*) of bureaucratic patrimonialism that Weber identified as ‘sultanism’ (*Sultanismus*).²⁸

In speaking of ‘sultanism’ as an “extreme case” and identifying it as the outcome of a “transition” (*Unterschied*) that is “continuous” (*fließend*) and moves from tradition to discretion, Weber’s conceptualization of political transformation appears more complex (and Eurocentric) than any uniform and one-directional process of rationalization accounts for.²⁹ In fact, his understanding

25 Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 612; translation from Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 954.

26 Weber *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 682; translation from Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1010.

27 Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*; see also Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, pp. 217–257.

28 See Weber *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp. 133–134; Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 231–232. Weber also explicitly referred to “Oriental sultanism” and to “the Near East [as] ... the classic location of ‘sultanism’” (p. 1020). The assumptions that inform these ‘orientalisms’ have by now been seriously problematized and falsified (see e.g. Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam*, esp. ‘Chapter 9. Max Weber: patrimonialism as a political type’, pp. 258–298).

29 Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 231; also p. 232 (Weber *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 134): “Where domination is primarily traditional, even though it is exercised by virtue of the

of this relationship between patriarchal/patrimonial and sultanistic authority arguably displays surprising parallels with Ibn Khaldun's and, especially, Polybius' assumptions about the degenerating nature of (traditional) power. For Weber, indeed, premodern state formation must be analyzed against the patrimonial background of "the continuous struggle of the central power with the various centrifugal local powers"; an endless oscillation between the centralizing and decentralizing tendencies that are identified as patrimonialism's "specific problem". In fact, in many ways this incorporates another iterative logic of political organizations waxing and waning between *ad hoc* and more complex power constellations (at least until, for Weber, modern rationalism enabled Europe to escape from that logic).³⁰

More generally, iterative models such as those of Ibn Khaldun, Polybius, and—at least for non-European political organization—Weber, and evolutionary models of state formation, which inform approaches such as Wittfogel's or for that matter of modern legalistic and political sciences, both seem to be ideal types at the extremities of a rich continuum of interpretations of that endless historical act of a state's formation. Most of these interpretations, however, including that of Goldstone and Haldon and more generally also that of Weber himself, situate themselves somewhere in between these evolutionary and iterative variables, trying both to avoid the pitfalls of determinism and also to allow for entropy. From a generalizing perspective, therefore, it appears more relevant to accept the reality of this analytical continuum in state formation studies than to identify where exactly on that continuum these and many more conceptualizations are to be situated. In fact, the most interesting general insight may well be that the variables that tend to be operationalized in this respect by most, if not all, relevant studies continue to relate directly to the shared essence of Ibn Khaldun's and Polybius' aforementioned conceptions and assumptions about the entropically increasing complexity of political organization and its active, even reproductive, integration of ever more stakeholders.

ruler's personal autonomy, it will be called *patrimonial authority*; where it indeed operates primarily on the basis of discretion (*freier traditionsungebundener Willkür*), it will be called *sultanism* (*sultanistische [Herrschaft]*). The transition is definitely continuous (*Der Unterschied ist durchaus fließend*). Both forms of domination are distinguished from elementary patriarchalism by the presence of a personal staff".

30 Weber *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 712; translation from Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1055. On this cyclical logic, see also Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, 1:172. For a critique on Weber's belief that only Europe manages to escape from this logic of traditionalism via its particular manifestation in the format of feudalism and its subsequent process of European urbanization, see Steinmetz, "Introduction", pp. 15–16: 'Weber and the Relegation of Culture to Non-Western and Premodern Sites'.

1.3 *Defining What States 'do'*

Another insight that follows from this generalizing perspective is that the state—as the integrative-*cum*-entropic process of the formation and transformation of an apparatus of coercion, distinction and differentiation in a mutually constituent combination with a hegemonic discourse—is, and always has been, experienced as a dominant mode of organization in history. “It appears that from very small beginnings some five thousand or more years ago”, Scheidel remarks, “the state soon became the demographically dominant type of human political organization”.³¹ As a result, studies of the state have also always revolved around, and been inspired by, questions about states’ actual roles in, and impact on, history. Alongside questions about the state’s definition and formation, another big issue at stake in studies of the premodern state has thus been: What does the state actually do? Governing society, or social groups, communities and formations, seems the most obvious and most widely contemplated answer here. Even so, the empirical reality of the minimalist nature of government in premodern contexts often tends to add important caveats to this kind of answer. Sociologist Anthony Giddens importantly remarks in this respect that

[i]t is misleading to describe the forms of rule typically found in non-modern states as ‘government’, if ‘government’ means a concern of the state with the regularized administration of the overall territory claimed as its own. *Traditional states did not ‘govern’ in this sense.* Their ‘polities’ were mainly limited to the governance of conflicts within the dominant classes, and within the main urban centres.³²

For most of human history, states simply did not have, aspire to, or consider acquiring, the power, resources and instruments to discipline a ‘society’ in the maximalist ways that the modern notion of ‘government’ suggests.³³ At least, studies of the state have never stopped to grapple with the measure—whether minimalist or rather more maximalist—of this state-society relationship. An important voice in this debate undoubtedly is that of sociologist and historian Charles Tilly, whose contribution to state formation studies of late medieval and early modern Europe has been crucial (see below). For Tilly, states engage primarily in war-making against external enemies, in state-making by integrating

31 Scheidel, “Studying the State”, p. 14.

32 Giddens, *Nation-State*, p. 57 (italics by Giddens); also referred to in Scheidel, “Studying the State”, pp. 16–17.

33 On this specific point, see also Mann, “Autonomous Power of the State”; Ando & Richardson, *Ancient States and infrastructural power*.

or excluding internal competitors, in protecting their main supporters and allies against enemies or competitors, and in extracting resources from subject populations to enable war-making, state-making and protection.³⁴ This focus on practices of exclusion, integration, reproduction and appropriation, however, at the same time implies that there are also many things that pre-modern states did not do. Many, if not most, voices in the field would certainly agree with the implication that Bourdieu's aforementioned claim that the state exerts "violence over a definitive territory and over the totality of the corresponding population" seems too maximalist (and perhaps also too modern) a definition.³⁵ Weber, again, appears to have been more nuanced in his understanding of this state-society relationship. As Scheidel explains, this is a nuance that easily tends to be forgotten, making Weber even more useful for studies of the premodern state than is generally acknowledged:

It is worth noting [...] that Weber speaks essentially of a claim to legitimate force *in the enforcement of state rules*, and does not envision an effective monopoly on physical coercion per se. In this regard, his approach fits the situation of early states with their diffused coercive capabilities better than is sometimes realized.³⁶

Among the multiple imaginations of the nature and impact of these "diffused coercive capabilities" Tilly's interlocking practices of exclusion, integration, reproduction and appropriation certainly stand out as referential, and are represented at least partly in most studies of what premodern states do. At the same time, quite a few scholars wish to go several steps further with the minimalism implied, questioning in varying degrees the very reality of the state-society relation. One important voice in this debate was certainly social anthropologist Ernest Gellner. Gellner actually preferred to think of pre-modern state-society relations in terms of social segmentation, with a horizontally oriented elite constituting the state, and extracting taxes from and maintaining

34 Tilly, "War Making and State Making", p. 181; Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, p. 96; also referred to in Scheidel, "Studying the State", p. 20. For Tilly, each activity generated its own agents and agencies, from armies over policing executives and courts to fiscal institutions.

35 Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State", p. 3. See also Loyal, *Bourdieu's Theory of the State*, pp. 111–121 ("How Penetrating is State Thought?", in Chapter 7: An Assessment of Bourdieu's Theory of the State).

36 Scheidel, "Studying the State", p. 5. Weber literally speaks of the legitimate use of coercion "in the implementation of its order (*die Durchführung der Ordnungen*)" (Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 29).

peace (and segregation) between otherwise largely disconnected social units of local communities.³⁷ Other modern scholars tend to push the analytical balance in favor of what Gellner identified as communities, strictly avoiding over-structuralist or top-down approaches and incorporating into their thinking varying notions of the state's social constructedness. Following Michel Foucault's insistence on the ubiquitous, 'capillary' and productive nature of power, Middle-East historian Tim Mitchell questions the very notion of the state as a social actor, and suggests that any kind of state/non-state interaction should not be taken "as the starting point of the analysis, but as an uncertain outcome of the historical process".³⁸ For Mitchell, the state should be understood as "a structural effect" of that process, which although "appearing as an apparatus that stands apart from the rest of the social world" in actual fact should be studied as the product of diverse social practices and arrangements that, importantly, also "produce the apparent separateness of the state and create effects of agency and partial autonomy, with concrete consequences".³⁹ In this conception, coercion, distinction, differentiation and hegemony do not necessarily constitute any coherent apparatus of power, but rather a diverse and contingent set of social relations, which simultaneously create an effect of their own appearance as a coherent apparatus.⁴⁰ In other words, states do not make history, but history makes states, as and when successful social practices of exclusion, integration, reproduction and appropriation start to appear and present themselves as a coherent apparatus of coercion, distinction, differentiation and hegemony.

37 Gellner, *Nations*, pp. 8–18; also referred to in Scheidel, "Studying the State", p. 16.

38 Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, p. 74.

39 Mitchell, "Limits of the State", pp. 90–91 ("Conceived in this way, the state is no longer to be taken as essentially an actor, with the coherence, agency, and subjectivity this term presumes. We should not ask 'Who is the state?', or 'Who dictates its policies?' Such questions presume what their answers pretend to prove: that some political subject, some *who*, preexists and determines those multiple arrangements we call the state. The arrangements that produce the apparent separateness of the state create the abstract effect of agency, with concrete consequences. Yet such agency will always be contingent upon the production of difference—upon those practices that create the apparent boundary between state and society. These arrangements may be so effective, however, as to make things appear the reverse of this. The state comes to seem a subjective starting point, as an actor that intervenes in society"); also in Mitchell, "Society, Economy and the State Effect", p. 84.

40 Mitchell, "Limits of the State", pp. 93–94; Mitchell (and Foucault) admittedly focus primarily on the modern state; for an argument in favor of this approach to also understanding other, premodern statist appearances, see Van Steenberg, "'Mamlukisation' between social theory and social practice", pp. 26–27.

In rethinking the state in this bottom-up manner, Mitchell actually takes direct issue with another, even more minimalist, trend in state studies. “The importance of the state as a common ideological and cultural construct”, Mitchell argues,

should be grounds not for dismissing the phenomenon in favor of some supposedly more neutral and accurate concept (such as political system), but for taking it seriously. Politics, after all, is a process built out of such shared constructs.⁴¹

This ‘cultural’ turn in state studies has indeed also given way to an analytical trend that involved even more radical questionings of the usefulness of the state as a heuristic concept to understand the social realities and impact of power. Seminal contributions to this include a posthumously published paper by historical sociologist Philip Abrams about “the difficulty of studying the state”, given what he described as “the secret of the non-existence of the state”.⁴² Perhaps one even more significant contribution is a survey about the uses and abuses of the state concept in European medieval studies by medieval historian Rees Davies who concluded that “the state has been given far too privileged a role in the analyses of power in earlier societies”.⁴³ This critical line of minimalist, if not nihilist, thought was informed by a growing unease with the dominant evolutionary paradigm of the medieval origins of European modern states (see below). It also displayed many belated echoes of similar debates that have been raging in the political sciences since the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁴ This approach found its most explicit medievalist representative in a survey history of later medieval European politics first published in 2009 by John Watts, an historian of late medieval England (see also below). Watts even argued that “it is not necessary to frame—one might almost say burden—the structural history of politics with the notion of the state”.⁴⁵ As a result, Watts

41 Mitchell, “Limits of the State”, p. 81.

42 Abrams, “Difficulty of Studying the State”, p. 77. (“The state is, then, in every sense of the term a triumph of concealment. It conceals the real history and relations of subjection behind an a-historical mask of legitimating illusion: contrives to deny the existence of connections and conflicts which would if recognised be incompatible with the claimed autonomy and integration of the state. The real official secret, however, is the secret of the non-existence of the state”).

43 Davies, “The Medieval State”, p. 289.

44 See Mitchell, “Limits of the State”, pp. 77–89 for a sketch and appraisal of this debate, including of Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back in”.

45 Watts, *Making of Politics*, p. 35.

decided not to speak of the state at all, but to adopt “a more open-ended perspective on the changing political structures of the period”.⁴⁶

This dismissive attitude, however, is certainly not the dominant position in state formation studies at large. Echoing Mitchell’s above-mentioned criticism, John Haldon was perhaps one of those who warned most forcefully against throwing out the baby with the bath water when pushing a minimalist approach to these extreme ends.

It is important to stress that the state does have an identity as a field of action, as a role-constituting site of power and practices which can be independent, under certain preconditions, of the economic and political interests of those who dominate it.⁴⁷

As in the case of Middle East historian Timothy Mitchell, Haldon entered this debate from a rather different background, not as a specialist of Western Europe but as a Byzantinist. In his thinking about the state as a tool in premodern historical research he was concerned with a far more theoretical “Marxist approach to the State”. Haldon asked questions on a Eurasian scale about “a historical materialist approach to the state, state elites, the relative or absolute autonomy of state structures and practices, and the role of the economic in Marxist historical interpretation”.⁴⁸ From his Eurasian and comparative perspectives Haldon actually recasted these debates between minimalists and maximalists in interestingly processual terms. Ascribing to the aforementioned notion of state formation as an endless process, he stressed “that state formations differ qualitatively in the degree of their ‘stateness’”, forbearing any comparisons between their historical manifestations across time and space that do not take into account the specifics of “very different structural contexts”.⁴⁹ Any study of states and of their impact on human history should therefore internalize the assumption that all statist manifestations are specific and can

46 Watts, *Making of Politics*, p. 35. For Watts “political structures” are “the frames and forms and patterns in which politics took place; frames, forms and patterns which conditioned those politics, and which also ... had some role to play in causing, as well as explaining, political action”. (p. 35). This position was recently re-iterated in perhaps a more nuanced and open way in De Weerd, Holmes & Watts, “Politics, c. 1000–1500”, p. 262. (“Today’s historians of medieval politics are more likely to be concerned with *process* rather than with trajectory and outcomes, and while, as we shall see, this by no means forecloses considerations of ‘the state’, political history does not have to be framed by that particular problematic”).

47 Haldon, *The State*, p. 33; referred to in Scheidel, “Studying the State”, p. 22.

48 Haldon, *The State*, p. 32.

49 Haldon, *The State*, p. 33.

only be considered as contextually defined exceptions of any one analytical model that may be employed. Rather than trying to reduce that specificity and exceptionality to, prioritize their features within, or exclude them from a statist ideal, what should matter most in comparative, and, for that matter, non-comparative historical research is to use that ideal to acknowledge for, and to decipher, specificity and exceptionality.⁵⁰ Scheidel believes that it is Tilly's "model of state formation driven by interstate and class conflict", through the interplay of war-making and state-making, that "holds promise for the study of any historical period, even as we must avoid the transfer of specifically European features to other environments".⁵¹ The latter critical distance may well be achieved by identifying where and how Tilly's model resonates with or may be further refined by the thinking of others, including Max Weber, Ibn Khaldun and Polybius.

2 Studying State Formation in Late Medieval Europe

Empirical studies on 'the state' in the Middle Ages—even if we limit ourselves for now to those dealing with Western Europe—are so numerous and diverse that it would be impossible to offer more than an outline of some general historiographical trends which are relevant to the present discussion. Until World War I, state formation was not an issue that would have been explicitly formulated by most traditional western medievalists. As will be detailed below, with the notable exception of theoretical discussions on the applicability of the modern concept of 'the state' on medieval society within German legal history, the concepts of 'state formation' or 'state-building' only really became popular in mainstream medieval historiography during the mid-1970s and 1980s when historical sociologists working in the Weberian and Marxist traditions had put it on the agenda more explicitly.

Territorialstaaten was an expression which German medievalists already used sometimes at the end of the nineteenth century, but otherwise the term 'state' was primarily used in the specific case of the 'Papal state' or in discussions of 'Church and state' inspired by contemporary conflicts.⁵² Some precocious explicit examples of the use of the term 'state formation' include, for

50 This necessary focus on the specific and on the apparently exceptional "to establish the distinctiveness [*Eigenart*]" of historical phenomena was also formulated and emphasized as part of any truly meaningful comparative approach by Weber (Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. xxxvii).

51 Scheidel, "Studying the State", p. 38.

52 For instance in the English translation of Ranke's work: von Ranke, *History of the Popes*.

instance, Vaughan's 1962 work on the Burgundian Duke Philip the Bold, and a remarkable earlier 1909 article by the Belgian medieval historian Henri Pirenne on 'the formation' of the Burgundian state.⁵³ As we will see below, Pirenne's powerful and systematic approach ensured that state building would become a central concept in Burgundian history. This approach rivaled the historiography of the two most centralized medieval Kingdoms France and England, and to a lesser degree the Iberian monarchies, leaving the decentralized Holy Roman Empire or the city-states of Italy mostly at the fringe of the debate (or else being studied in terms of why state formation before the nineteenth century had failed in these regions). Pirenne apologized to the traditionally empiricist readers of his time that "state is a modern term", but also affirmed that it was not an arbitrary notion but rather one "based on historic fact".

At the origin of Pirenne's observations was the German legal idea of the re-centralization of public authority, which had been fragmented as a result of feudalism, into a modern *Staatsgewalt*. Before that time medievalists had mostly discussed questions of the growth of state power or public authority just in passing when dealing with the personalities and policies of princes. By the end of the nineteenth century the problem was being posed in more explicit terms. Von Below already consciously used the expression 'state' for the Empire as a whole. He was clearly inspired by Hegel's teleological philosophy in which the development of the state was a necessary objective to guarantee the wellbeing of a people.⁵⁴ In 1904, the French legal historian Jacques Flach, for instance, also considered the efforts of the Capetian kings to reestablish royal power over a France torn apart by feudal anarchy to be a "renaissance of the state."⁵⁵ For his part, Heinrich Mitteis, the most influential legal historian of the first half of the twentieth century, used the notion of the *Personenverbandsstaat* for the central Middle Ages, defining it as a state based upon the association of persons rather than a modern state with bureaucratic institutions.⁵⁶ The main concern for medievalists became identifying a state which was 'impersonal' in the sense that it was detached from the person of the prince. This implied that the rule of the state was supported by a theoretical construct based not only upon principles of law and governance but also by an apparatus of government offices whose actual institutional functioning was not solely controlled by the prince's arbitrary decisions. In an intellectual climate dominated by

53 Vaughan, *Philip the bold*; Pirenne, "The Formation and Constitution of the Burgundian State".

54 Von Below, *Der deutsche Staat des Mittelalters*.

55 Flach, *Les origines de l'ancienne France*. Vol. 3.

56 Mitteis, *Lehnrecht und Staatsgewalt*; idem, *Der Staat des hohen Mittelalters*.

thinkers like Hegel and Ranke, the idealist and hermeneutic trend within German historiography inevitably considered the state foremost as an idea, an abstract legal notion, or in more practical terms, as an administrative and political entity apart from the person of the prince.⁵⁷

It was this incipient usage of the term which, in 1909, inspired Pirenne, a more materialistically oriented historian who mostly focused upon socio-economic processes. Pirenne also spoke of 'states' in the Middle Ages, although he emphasized that the Burgundian state was larger than the separate principalities in the Holy Roman Empire thus denoted. Pirenne's focus traditionally remained on dynastic politics but he also systematically considered the positions of the cities and the nobility within this process, as well as the relationship between "political centralization" and "social and economic changes", the evolution of central institutions and the creation of a standing army by the dukes. In short, he developed a surprisingly modern and sociological approach for a historian of those days.⁵⁸ Similarly, building mostly on German scholarship, in 1936 Sir Frederick Powicke also made a critical assessment of "the problems the word 'state' suggests when it is applied to medieval society". A careful empiricist, taking into account a variety of types of medieval documents, he opted to speak of a state as the condition in which a ruling power had firmly established its authority over other powerful groups in a given territory, but his analysis lacked any systematics and would continue to set the tone in British medieval history with its longtime fear for any kind of sociological generalizations apart from the national parliamentary mythology present in Whig History.⁵⁹

In the meantime, another line of theory on the modern state and its formation came not from legal and institutional history but from philosophy and the new discipline of sociology. Hegel's *Beamtenstaat* and his praise for the administrative class of Prussia had laid the foundations for the concepts of the state upheld by both Marx and Weber. However, of these two great sociologists only the latter would have a real impact on medieval history before World War II. As suggested above, for European history at least Weber's focus was on the autonomy of the administrative and legal institutions from the political sphere of decision making, on processes of rationalization and bureaucratization and on the monopoly of legitimate force to effectively exercise domination in a regular manner within a given territory. To some degree a co-thinker of Weber while also departing from his viewpoints on many matters, the Prussian Otto Hintze was one of the first historians to analyze state formation as a process which had

57 See Post, "Law and Politics in the Middle Ages".

58 Pirenne, "The Formation and Constitution of the Burgundian State".

59 Powicke, "Reflections on the Medieval State".

to be systematically tackled with clear conceptual tools. In his “constitutional and administrative history” (or to cite the better German term ‘*Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsgeschichte*’), he focused on the relations between specific types of states (he considered these historical forms to be “real types” based on concrete historical observation as opposed to Weber’s “ideal types”) with specific forces in society. He for instance distinguished between “sovereign states” developing from more centralized forms of feudalism and “commercial states” supported by bourgeois capitalism.⁶⁰

The points of view of both Weber and Hintze, however, were soon strongly criticized by another influential medieval historian, the Nazi-party member Otto Brunner. Brunner opposed analyzing medieval lordship in such modern terms influenced by liberal constitutionalism and also criticized the Hegelian opposition between state and society that Weber and Hintze had maintained. For Brunner medieval notions of lordship as well as community had to be analyzed in their own terms, focusing on the legal expressions used at the time. In the tradition of Otto von Gierke’s *Deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht* which posited that collective associations were at the basis of medieval society, Brunner stressed the interaction between the notion of *Herrschaft*, based on the personal ties between rulers and subjects and other *Persönnenverbände* on the one hand, and the *Genossenschaft* principle on the other.⁶¹ The concept of legitimate rule or *Herrschaft* and hence the ideological representations of state power and their interactions with theology were first systematically studied by two other German far right historians: Percy Schramm and Ernst Kantorowicz. Schramm studied the symbols of the medieval state, thus focusing on the Hegelian idea of the state rather than on its material support. Kantorowicz argued that the fourteenth-century state assumed some of the sacred power of the Church.⁶²

During the 1940s and 1950s, the term state was still rarely used by medieval historians, but during the 1960s this began to change for good with some conceptual discussions and with notable works such as the one by the Spanish early modern historian José Antonio Maravall. Maravall studied the later medieval origins of an early modern state in elaborate detail from the point of view of developing ‘modern’ mentalities in Spain and the cultural control of the absolutist monarchs on the nobility.⁶³ Of more lasting importance, however, were the contributions by the American medievalists Joseph Strayer and

60 Hintze, *Staat und Verfassung*.

61 Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft*; von Gierke, *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*.

62 Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*; Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik*.

63 Maravall, *Estado moderno y mentalidad social*.

Gaines Post. For the aforementioned Strayer, the comparative analysis of government institutions should be the key method used to discover a growth of state power between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries. Strayer's focus was legal, administrative and financial, and used an explicit top-down perspective. In Strayer's view the early modern state had developed from medieval embryonic state structures originating in the twelfth century into more efficient government institutions with appointed and permanent office-holders replacing the prevailing feudal and hereditary fragmentation of power amongst the hands of noble lineages. A second crucial development was the creation and strengthening of royal courts of law. As these institutional developments also permitted better control of revenues, a third crucial factor in state formations was the centralization of taxation, an element which Charles Tilly picked up on somewhat later. The logical conclusion for historians was to see Philip the Fair's reign in France around the turn of the fourteenth century as a breaking point. The prince, supported by his centralizing legists, had already been considered as the archetype of the medieval state-builder before Strayer's work. According to Strayer, in the later Middle Ages, however, crisis and war would temporarily suspend this process of state-building through institutional centralization.⁶⁴ In the meantime, Strayer's close colleague Gaines Post held on to a legal conception of a state, defining it in terms of public law and medieval 'political theory', or in other words in terms of the legal, theological and moral principles of governance upheld by contemporary authors.⁶⁵ In this sense his approach was complementary to Strayer's but also remained rooted in the traditions of German historiography. And in fact, this research tradition of looking for 'ideas of the state' in learned theological and legal treatises and dealing with the reception of Roman Law that had started in the nineteenth century still continues today.⁶⁶ The influence notably of the legal historical tradition and the work of Hintze and Brunner in Germany and that of Strayer and Guenée in the US and France is still present in more traditional empirical studies dealing with some aspects of state formation.

The next impetus in the debate came indeed from France, and notably from the work of Bernard Guenée, who saw in later medieval state formation a duality and a dialogue between the person of the ruler and the communities of the realm represented by the estates.⁶⁷ The combined influence of the older legal-historical tradition and Strayer and Guenée's emphasis on the role of state

64 Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*; idem, *The Reign of Philip the Fair*.

65 Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought*.

66 See e.g. Canning, "Ideas of the State".

67 Guenée, *L'Occident aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*.

elites led to a renewed focus on the role of the legists and other officers of the state. That role could only be studied systematically by making use of prosopography, the collective biography of the elites which had also been applied, for instance, in Roman history, and this is still a prominent way of tackling the question of state formation, also of non-Western societies. The concept of political society which Guenée introduced led to an emphasis on representative institutions and their delegates as both counterweights and collaborators of the state building process, again through a combination of institutional and prosopographical approaches. This school of thought was continued by scholars such as Blockmans, Genet and Bulst and gave rise to a fruitful series of studies during the 1980s and 1990s.⁶⁸

However, it was the influence of the new wave of historical sociology that, independently from the medievalist traditions, with a clear focus on modern history and starting with Barrington Moore and Theda Skocpol in the 1950s, would become decisive for these new trends in medieval history.⁶⁹ The key figure in this respect was the aforementioned Charles Tilly. Tilly saw state-building first of all as a competitive struggle, both between polities and within their territory, in which some contenders obtained victory and other ones lost. Tilly's influence was very important but it cannot be said that Tilly's first major contribution to the debate stopped more traditional Western medievalists from continuing to use less theoretically informed categories of state and state-building. In his first major contributions to the debate in 1975, Tilly argued that the modern state essentially developed within a dialectical interplay with 'war' and 'taxes' as the two core elements. Charles Tilly had come to this simple but brilliant and still very appealing hypothesis by building upon an impressive wave of historical-sociological work during the first decades after World War II. At least some of this work, mostly appearing in the format of grand narratives, deserves to be introduced here before explaining how Tilly further developed his paradigm.

Thinkers like Moore, Skocpol and Tilly himself wrote very grand narratives, on states and revolution, and they combined Marx and Weber in very appealing ways according to the dominant structuralist and large-scale comparative paradigms of the day. But another classic historiographical debate was taking place at the same time: the one on 'the transition from feudalism to capitalism' which was rather an internal-Marxist discussion but also brought in some Smithian

68 Bulst and Genet, *La ville, la bourgeoisie et la genèse de l'état moderne*; Blockmans and Genet, *The Origins of the Modern State*.

69 Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship*; Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*.

elements.⁷⁰ Perry Anderson is another authority in the field who took up a specifically Marxist position in the state formation discussion by writing two very readable and eclectic books. In these he tried to link the transition from one 'mode of production' (or according to him rather a genuinely existing 'social formation') into another with the specific 'superstructural' forms of domination and authority.⁷¹ Finally, as a later offshoot of this branch of grand narratives in historical sociology, there was Michael Mann's 'Sources of Social Power'. This new Weberian approach to multicausality in historical developments, however, seems to have come too late to still be influential, as by the late eighties poststructuralism and postcolonial theories were rapidly gaining ground. Although like Anderson's work, this approach originally departed from Engels' famous phrase on the "relative autonomy of the state", Mann's model never seemed to inspire the more empirically oriented historians in the strict sense in the same way as Tilly's one, which was institutionally propagated by Blockmans and Genet. In general, however, both the more classical Marxist approaches and Mann's work start from the extra-economic appropriation of surplus, whereas the more Weberian-inspired historical sociologists were also very preoccupied with the question of legitimate forms of domination.

Another notable influence on Tilly and his generation was the work of yet another student of Max Weber: the sociologist Norbert Elias. His *Civilizing Process*, written in 1939 but only receiving real attention from the 1960s onwards, considered the state formation process in terms of growing networks of interdependency.⁷² Elias' work put networks of clientage and patronage, and notably those in which the nobility and other state elites were involved, strongly on the agenda, so that historians working under his influence again mainly made use of the prosopographical method. Questions like the relations between local and central elites, and the role of factions and party struggle within state formation were often studied, making implicit or explicit use of Elias' insights.⁷³

But Elias' impact on the discussion was rather short-lived and it was Tilly's paradigm that would remain exerting the strongest influence. In his most mature definition of 1990, Charles Tilly defined states as "coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories". This definition includes "city states, empires and many other forms

70 Sweezy, *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*.

71 Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*.

72 Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.

73 Blockmans, "Patronage, Brokerage and Corruption".

of government, but excludes tribes, lineages, firms and churches". Tilly made further distinctions between "national states" as "states governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralized, differentiated and autonomous structures" and "nation states" as states "whose people share a strong linguistic, religious and symbolic identity".⁷⁴ Thus, Tilly's 'national state' is an ideal type close to Weber's bureaucratic form of legitimacy.

The influences of Strayer and Hintze were also present in the above-mentioned multi-volume series of books directed by Genet and Blockmans.⁷⁵ In the 1980s and early 1990s, a series of conferences was organized on the topic, first in France and later on a European level. The focus here was on the *'genèse de l'État moderne'*, during which various specialists empirically and theoretically discussed aspects of state building. These included the role of burghers, aristocrats and state officials, usually informed by the prosopographical method which became ever more popular as an innovative way to study institutions from the social point of view. These aspects furthermore also included the importance of finance and taxation, the influence of culture and ideology and the relationship between 'Church and State'.⁷⁶ We can summarize the fundamental grand narrative presented by the two medievalists as follows. Between c. 1280 and c. 1360 the development of 'modern states' in Europe was determined by the interplay of the two main Tillyan factors of 'War' and 'Taxation'. In other words: states developed in their 'modern' form within a dialectics between centralized surplus extraction and state building through military expenses. Taxes were needed to build armies and armies were needed to defend the state from both external and internal threats, namely foreign predators and revolts. This process developed an internal logic which further stimulated the development of centralized judicial, fiscal-financial, administrative and military institutions, institutions which over time developed their own 'relative autonomy' and gave birth to a professional class of state servants with 'bureaucratic' characteristics. The bureaucrats then diffused a proper form of 'state ideology' that served their own interests as well as those of the state over 'localist', 'patrimonial' or 'feudal' interests. The modern state thus succeeded in exercising ever more control on its subjects and territory and in mobilizing ever more men and means in its efforts to further centralize, and this became a self-perpetuating process, although it was often also kept in check by parliamentary institutions, urban revolts or attempts by aristocrats and state officials to re-appropriate elements of public power for themselves. Thus, in this narrative

74 Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, pp. 1–2 (see also fn. 5).

75 Genet, "L'État moderne: un modèle opératoire".

76 Blockmans and Genet, *The Origins of the Modern State*.

the state, its institutions and its officer class are to some degree 'superposed' and to some degree 'integrated' in local societies or communities, in the interplay between centrifugal and centripetal social and political forces. The specific institutional shape which this process took resulted in what is now ever more termed a 'path dependency', a structural inertia of development able to determine the forms and functions of state formation and the adjoining fields of tension for centuries to come. Genet also integrated Tilly's model into a broader Marxist analysis by articulating the 'modern state' with the feudal mode of production. As a result of this, 'state feudalism' led to an ever-greater share of surplus product being extra-economically appropriated, not in the form of classic feudal rent but as centralized taxes, to be redistributed again among the state elites.⁷⁷

Like any other historical discussion on 'modernity'—the same thing notably goes for 'capitalism'—the state formation debate in studies on the medieval and early modern West seems to be trapped within inevitable sets of dichotomies. Apart from 'pre-modern' and 'modern' itself, the discussion on the 'early modern' or 'modern state' includes classical bipolar oppositions such as: 'centripetal' versus 'centrifugal' forces, 'bureaucracy' versus 'patrimonialism' or 'feudalism' (or, with an East-West opposition added to it, 'sultanism'), 'state' versus 'cities' or 'local communities', 'conflict' versus 'harmony', 'community' or 'integration', 'the elite' or 'ruling class' versus 'the people' etc. One can perhaps also add to this analytical canon of bipolar oppositions Ibn Khaldun's aforementioned tension between the dynastic and urban elements on the one hand and the nomadic and pastoral ones on the other. There now seems to be a quasi-general consensus among scholars studying state formation on the relevance of all of these oppositions.

Moreover, since the 1990s, it seems that Charles Tilly has successfully managed to add to the mix a new fundamental scheme of interpretation which is also constructed in a bipolar manner, namely his analytical distinction between 'capital' and 'coercion' within paths of development. In his last work on state formation, published in 1990, apart from a "coercion-intensive" path of state formation, Tilly also distinguished a more "capital-intensive" possibility. Basically, 'coercion' means 'the state' while 'capital' means 'the city'. Tilly defines capital very broadly as "any tangible mobile resources, and enforceable claims on such resources".⁷⁸ According to Tilly's further explanation, in a volume published in 1994, "cities shape the destinies of states chiefly by serving as

77 Genet, "Féodalisme et naissance de l'état moderne".

78 Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, p. 17.

containers and distributing points of capital”.⁷⁹ In the same volume Blockmans nuances this by stressing the importance of “bottom-up movements” contributing to the outcome of power struggles, at least in areas of “high urban density” although his main emphasis also remains a fiscal and commercial one.⁸⁰ More generally, in his brief account of the Burgundian state, the aforementioned historical sociologist Michael Mann also has the tendency to reduce cities to their economic role and does not really consider them as socio-political communities. He also fails to take into account other types of communities such as villages and corporate groups. Moreover, the role of the state elites is almost never discussed in terms of the urban background which many of them shared, even if only in education or culture. They are mostly considered either as docile servants of the state or as intermediaries in negotiating for it with the local communities. Thus, in the mainstream narratives on state formation, notwithstanding the work of Blockmans, Blicke and others, the city still has no real ‘agency’ except as a source of capital and perhaps as home to some elites who will join the state apparatus. Even in the Italian ‘city-states’, proper state formation is only recognized as soon as a city tightened its grip on the *contado*, the surrounding countryside which it exploited, and thus stopped being a comune and instead became a territorial principality, a *signoria*.⁸¹

But can the city really be merely considered as a source of ‘capital’ as it is in Tilly’s model (note that he uses the term very broadly in the sense of material resources and not in a Marxist way). Tilly’s logic of state formation fundamentally considers flow from the bottom to the top of material resources (by way of taxing the subjects) and men (soldiers). Of course, how could it be denied that these surplus flows were necessary for the building of any kind of state structure? And this then becomes the grid of analysis which Tilly uses to distinguish between forms of state formation which are ‘coercion intensive’ (e.g. Tsarist Russia) and ‘capital intensive’ (e.g. the Netherlands). Although Blockmans and Genet had also always placed much weight on the factors of ‘negotiation’ with local and regional political communities and the ‘political society’ of the elites, in the model they shared with Tilly, the autonomous agency of these local communities and the proper interests of these emerging state elites somewhat disappear. As a result, another line of thought in sociology seems to have been slightly obscured during the last decades of the hegemony of Tilly, Genet and Blockmans (although the latter two certainly never entirely lost sight of it). This line goes from Otto von Gierke’s *Deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht* to Walter

79 Tilly and Blockmans, *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe*, p. 8.

80 Tilly and Blockmans, *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe*, p. 225.

81 Chittolini, *La formazione dello Stato regionale*.

Ullmann's 'ascending theory of power' and Peter Blicke's '*Kommunalismus*'.⁸² Leaving aside all the nuances in theory and formulation, one might say that this is a tradition which emphasizes the idea of a state formation 'from below' more than the rather top-down model of the centralizing and coercive state hungry for war and taxes and the full administrative control over its inhabitants. Again, it must be said that Genet and certainly Blockmans also acknowledged this bottom-up tradition, given that one of the volumes of '*The Origins of the Modern State*' was edited by Peter Blicke. Moreover, in the Belgian school of medievalists there was also certainly a tradition, starting with Henri Pirenne, of considering state formation to emerge from the tension between 'the state' and 'the city', especially during the 'Burgundian' fifteenth century. Nevertheless, it seems that this tradition of state formation 'from below' continues to represent a largely neglected, and at the same time highly promising, paradigm.

Current work in the field offers a pluralism in theoretical approaches that is not easily summarized here. Recently, Lecuppre-Desjardin even returned to a Brunnerian point of view of a composite principality based on local customary and political traditions and on personal relations, warning about an all too easy use of the term 'state' in the Burgundian context.⁸³ For the aforementioned John Watts the structures of government and the shared patterns of political life that were already in place were reinforced during the fourteenth and fifteenth century exactly because of war and crisis. Watts emphasizes not only that the state saw its power and authority rising but also that we must take into account the role played by smaller political structures such as cities and lordships, other institutions like the Church or guilds, networks of patronage and vassalage, as well as ideological discourse. At the same time, he also suggests that developments in taxation, law and justice are still central to state-building.⁸⁴

Thus, for over a century now the issue of the state and its development has been, and continues to be, a prominent one for both empirically oriented historians and sociological model building within scholarship of the later medieval and early modern state in Europe. As will be detailed below, however, these occasionally fierce debates on the state's uses and conceptualizations do not really have any similarly impactful counterparts in the study of fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia.

82 Ullmann, *Medieval Political Thought*; Blicke, *Kommunalismus*.

83 Lecuppre-Desjardin, *Le royaume inachevé*.

84 Watts, *The Making of Politics*.

3 Studying State Formation in Fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia

Empirical studies engaging with questions of ‘the state’ in late medieval, and especially fifteenth-century, Islamic West-Asia are as unwieldy and diverse as is true for late medieval Europe. Research on the region has long been dominated by dynastic historiography, and this continues to be the case. As such, all types of empirical studies in the field have always situated themselves one way or another within the statist frameworks of Ottoman and Timurid family rule, of Turkmen nomadic leaderships, and of the Sultanate of Cairo and its central power elites of *mamlūk* origins. As with the above survey of work on Europe, therefore, for the study of West-Asia it would be also impossible to do more than take stock of dominant historiographical trends as these have defined these distinct dynastic traditions.

These trends, however, do not just all share a more or less explicitly dynastic understanding of social and cultural realities, including of political organization, dividing the field into three separate research traditions of Mamlukologists, (early) Ottomanists and specialists of Turkmen and Timurid history. As will be further explained below, many, if not most, of these historians of late medieval Islamic West-Asia also share a lack of any explicit concern with more theoretical reflections on that political organization, meaning that assumptions about its statist appearances tend to be taken for granted rather than explained. With a handful of notable exceptions, defining the concept and heuristic meanings of state formation was never really a priority within mainstream historiography of late medieval Islamic West-Asia. It is therefore not straightforward to describe those dominant historiographical trends, many of which we have to reconstruct from implicit assumptions rather than from explicit choices and arguments. Nevertheless, as mentioned, the (dynastic) state has been significant in the historiography of late medieval Islamic West-Asia, meaning that it is certainly useful to provide a general reconstruction of how the state actually mattered, if only to uncover how also here Marxist and, especially, Weberian readings of resource accumulation, war-making and state-making have left their traces. Before engaging with particular contributions and ideas in each of the three dynastic research traditions, we will therefore first provide a general outline of the wider frameworks that informed all three traditions and that appear to have coalesced around Weber’s concepts of either traditional or, especially, legal authority.

3.1 *The Dominance of Legalistic Readings and the Sociological Turns of Lapidus, Hodgson and Chamberlain*

As noted earlier in this chapter, the history of state studies in general has been marred by an analytical dichotomy between legalistic and sociological

approaches. At least, this somewhat reductive legalistic *versus* sociological framing seems very useful to organize and understand how the state has been considered in the different dynastic historiographies of West-Asia. In fact, within these historiographies there is an interesting prevalence of the former, legalistic, frame. This is largely due to the fact that within these historiographical traditions there has always been a strong presence of Islamicists and modern specialists of Islam. These scholars have always been primarily interested in the formation of Islam as a normative cultural, social and political practice and have always tended to see the history of Sunni Islam's legal system as one of the crucial vectors of this formative process. This Islamicist focus means that for a long time, understandings of political organization in Islamic West-Asia have been considered first and foremost from a legal perspective of formal procedures, structures and discourses that were somehow related to the implementation of God's Law (*shari'a*). Contemporary writings and related sources in Arabic and Persian certainly lend themselves easily to these legalistic interpretations. This is not just because of the legal training and employment shared by most of their authors, but also because of the prescriptive, normative and legitimating agendas that these texts all served. At the same time this legalistic frame was also informed by particular modern narratives of Asian otherness and of an Islamic state formation process that was considered fundamentally different from the secular and liberal destiny of the West. The notion of the absolutist rule of divine law and of legal conservatism offered a highly functional framework which many modern scholars have used to explain the post-Abbasid Islamic world's absorption of Inner Asian nomadic conquerors and the maladroit condominium between violence-wielding Turko-Mongol 'outsiders' and that world's sophisticated urban elites, especially its religious scholars and judges as well as the caliphs of Baghdad and, eventually, Cairo.⁸⁵

In the early 1990s the Ottomanist Rifa'at 'Ali Abou-El-Haj heavily criticized this traditional reading of the state which had also for a long time permeated early modern Ottoman studies. In fact, in a programmatic publication on the study of Ottoman state formation he usefully summarized the basic—a-historical and absolutist—assumptions of this legalistic trend in scholarship. On the one hand, Abou-El-Haj lamented the fact that “in twentieth century scholarly writing on Ottoman affairs, the concept, the institution, and the nature of the state have been treated as if, regardless of the passage of time, the state had remained essentially the same”. On the other hand, he claims that

85 Representative and, at the same time, constitutive examples of this particular legalistic trend are Tyan, *Institutions du droit public musulman*; Schimmel, “Kalif und Kadi im spätmittelalterlichen Ägypten”; Lambton, *State and Government in medieval Islam*.

modern West-Asian scholarship is predisposed “to regard the modern nation-state with its meritocratic bureaucracy as a paradigm”, so that “modern sociologically evolved standards as merit, public service, equity, and rationalized practices” tend to be used to “measure the early modern Ottoman state”. For Abou-El-Haj this perspective derives from “the misapprehension that prior to the seventeenth century the Ottoman state was a centralized, efficient, and rational public entity, unique in the period during which it flourished”.⁸⁶ In Abou-El-Haj’s reading these are highly problematic assumptions of pre-seventeenth century Ottoman meritocratic maximalism and uniqueness. In fact, these assumptions have for a long time been constituent partners of the legalistic trend in general. In this dominant reading the idea, or the ideal, of the state as a continuous and autonomous constitutionalist bureaucracy actually served as an interpretative norm against which historians were supposed to weigh the course of state formation in post-Abbasid West-Asian history writ large, as if the whole was meant to culminate in Ottoman absolutism.

The field of Islamic West-Asian political history continues to be easily lured by the clear-cut categories and well-trodden narratives of legalistic readings. Starting in the middle of the twentieth century, however, there also emerged more sociologically inspired approaches to political organization and state formation in later medieval Islamic West-Asia. For a long time, such developments mostly happened in the margins of the field and its legalistic readings, and it has to be acknowledged that the pioneering beginnings of this alternative, sociological approach arguably lie in assumptions of the growing irrelevance of traditional statist structures in the face of Turko-Mongol irruption. This overture therefore engaged with a search for alternative conceptualizations of power and its organization in response to a presumed ineptness or even failure of the continuing legalistic state and its bureaucratic apparatus of power. The basic ingredients that were proposed to solve this analytical irrelevance of the legalistic state were Weberian traditional authority and the military household and family rule, patronage and mostly urban institutions for the local management and organization of resource flows. There are three pioneering contributions to this critical sociological turn in Islamic state formation studies that deserve to be expanded upon more explicitly. First and foremost, there are the writings of Ira Lapidus and Marshall Hodgson which are particular products of mid-twentieth century structuralism and systems theory. They fused the dominant legalistic reading of the state in Islamic West-Asian studies with a search for alternatives in highly creative and influential ways. Alongside these two authors we will also consider here the writings of

86 Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State*, pp. 8, 9, 10.

Michael Chamberlain, as they represent an important translation of the ideas of Lapidus and Hodgson to late twentieth century post-structuralism and also as Chamberlain was arguably the first to truly think without the traditional legalistic paradigm.

Ira Lapidus, in his *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, argued that the locus of power in the urban centers of late medieval Egypt and Syria no longer lay with the state. Indeed, here he still conceptualized the state in a legalistic fashion as the central bureaucratic apparatus that organized these centers' protection and exploitation. Due to what Lapidus defined as "the privatization of power", power instead lay with the capacities of the state's agents to engage in mutually beneficial informal relations of patronage and service beyond tributary and military needs. These agents were military commanders ("the Mamluks") with their expansive urban households and religious scholars ("the Ulama"), who were quasi-integrated in the state apparatus and simultaneously endowed with ambitious urban communal roles. Lapidus explained that he was "drawing on the work of Weber, Parsons, and other students of social process" and following the systemic readings by these theorists he proposed that "the Political System" was not confined to the state, but joined "the Mamluk State and the Urban Notables" in the balancing act of "a governing condominium" which boiled down to "a shared control over the society". More specifically, this meant that

while the Mamluks took up the massive economic and military responsibilities, the notables lent their intimate grasp of local affairs to the service of the state and coordinated the government of society at more intricate levels. Their original social importance made them indispensable auxiliaries of the Mamluk state apparatus, and in turn their partial assimilation to the regime served to validate their local status and to assure their success in communal roles.⁸⁷

Marshall Hodgson (1922–1968) is best known for his magisterial, posthumously published three-volume *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*. In this total history of Islamic societies and cultures Hodgson was certainly more explicitly concerned with processes of political transformation than his younger colleague Lapidus in *Muslim Cities*. At the same time, even though also indebted to the predominance of systems theory in post-World War II times, Hodgson's writings were less theoretically grounded than Lapidus' work. Nevertheless, Hodgson's particular conceptualizations of time,

⁸⁷ Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, quotes pp. viii, 116.

space and phenomena pertaining to the *longue durée* of Islamic history were no less compelling or influential. This is also apparent from Lapidus' later *magnum opus* of similar ambition *A History of Islamic Societies* (1988). Lapidus' discussion in that book of "the Post-'Abbasid Concept of the State" concludes, in a very Hodgsonian 'historicization' and 'nomadization' of his above-mentioned understanding of the state and wider 'political system', that

between 950 and 1500, a region-wide pattern of governmental institutions took shape. These institutions began with the late 'Abbasid practice of the caliphate, the use of slave military forces and *iqta'* forms of tax administration, and nomadic concepts of family and state authority. This new order first took shape in the eastern provinces of the former 'Abbasid Empire under the aegis of the Buwayhids, the Ghaznavids, and the early Saljuqs.⁸⁸

For Hodgson, as for Lapidus, the locus of power in what Hodgson termed 'the Middle Periods' (1000–1500 CE) had actually shifted towards specific social actors, in a double process defined as 'militarization' and 'unitary contractualism'. In this process military amirs and urban notables (*a'yan*) primarily pursued personal interests and responsibilities in mutual relationships that "amounted sometimes to a relation of personal patronage—a type of relation that played a major role in such a society". In this egalitarian context, authority did not simply derive from any impersonal state apparatus, but was an achievement of personal relationships. These empowering bonds appeared in the format of contract-like arrangements that subscribed to a uniform communal framework of obligations and expectations, mainly though not exclusively informed by divine law (*Shari'a*). Alluding to Weber's aforementioned definitions of legitimate authority and its three ideal types as well as to Weber's idea of the state as a monopolist of legitimate physical coercion, Hodgson formulated this 'medieval' empowerment of society, as a Muslim community, as follows:

Whether an independent position of authority was legitimized by appeal to personal charisma or to explicit law or to custom, it was conceived as established by mutual agreement and as assuming mutual obligations between one individual and others. [...] always it was a contract-type arrangement which had to be renewed personally with each new holder of authority and was properly binding only on those who had personally

88 Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 262.

accepted it. [...] The religious community was [...] almost—though not quite—liberated from dependence on an agrarian-based state; so that its communal law, built on its communal presuppositions, and not that of any territorial state, assumed the persisting primacy that accrues to whatever possesses exclusive legitimacy. It was not quite liberated: the ultimate sanction of force remained critical, and was left in the hands of the state. But the role of the state was as far reduced, especially in the basic sphere of law, as it ever has been in cited high culture.⁸⁹

For Hodgson this ‘communal’ empowerment was part and parcel of a historical process of state-society polarization that involved “the collapse of the caliphal state and its bureaucracy”. This led to the subsequent difficulty “to develop any really integrated states”, and the formation—especially in the wake of the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century—of new “military constructions”. Despite moments of brilliance, time and again these constructions “failed to provide sufficient strength to self-perpetuating bureaucracies which would have assured a continuity of authority despite the personality of the amir, and often failed to go far beyond a purely tribal, essentially irresponsible notion of power, in which the whole land became the proper prey of the prowess of a vigorous tribe”.⁹⁰

Hodgson was trying to come to terms here with the Middle Periods’ historical context of short-lived military state formations constructed around political patterns informed by nomadism, Turko-Mongol ideas and ideals of power, and Inner Asian steppe life. For this context, Hodgson actually developed his own statist model parallel to Lapidus’ “governing condominium”, to understand how these patterns also included a “nomad-urban symbiosis” which eventually, in early modern times, helped to overcome the structural problem of failing political integration and insufficient bureaucratic power. This became the highly influential model of the ‘military patronage state’, in which “the steppe principles of nomad patronage of urban culture were generalized”, and which, for Hodgson, had a particular, historical effect on processes of state formation in late medieval and early modern Islamic West-Asia. In his reading of these patterns and processes, the state-society scales were again tipped in favor of the state, which thus gradually re-appeared as an absolutist legal structure and an institutional apparatus of centralizing power. Hodgson summarized this model and its evolutionary process as follows:

89 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, pp. 348, 349–350.

90 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, pp. 398, 400, 404.

The Mongol states did, nevertheless, introduce the notions characterizing the ‘military patronage state’, which was to have a great future; and in doing so they modified the context of the Muslim institutions. Already in central Eurasia itself, the nomad-urban symbiosis had been raised above the level of simple plundering exploitation. In the agrarian societies of Islamdom, under the impulse of the tremendous successes of the Mongols and of the Turkic tribes that had shared their victories, the symbiosis was raised to a yet higher level. The Mongols from the first acted in a spirit of monumental achievement: they destroyed in the grand manner, they built in the grand manner too. All this had a relatively enduring institutional residue which we may pinpoint under three heads, recalling, however, that no one state is being described, but only features that frequently did occur under the Mongols and among their heirs, and that show mutual relevance. First, a legitimation of independent dynastic law; second, the conception of the whole state as a single military force; third, the attempt to exploit all economic and high-cultural resources as appanages of the chief military families. However, most of these institutional tendencies merely had their beginnings in Mongol times, which still displayed much continuity with the Earlier Middle Period; some were not developed fully till the sixteenth century, when the use of gunpowder weapons had given the central states (and the patterns they embodied) much more power.⁹¹

Hodgson’s model of the ‘military patronage state’⁹² conceived of the state as a rudimentary military apparatus of violence and exploitation that pursued legitimate authority and local connectivity via its leading military families’ patronage of cultural elites and resources. It was applied as an interpretive tool in his detailed historical survey of the Middle Periods, where he built upon much extant historiographical scholarship to also engage with ‘medieval’ polities such as those of the fifteenth century. In the case of so-called Mamluk Cairo, Hodgson especially stressed the military element and the total exclusion of non-military society from an institutionalized type of absolutist power that he identified as oligarchic and as qualified by “chivalry” and “incessant intestine fights.”⁹³ In the Timurid case, Hodgson preferred to highlight the factor of cultural patronage, explaining that “in the field of the arts the Timurids illustrate

91 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, pp. 405–406.

92 See also Crossley, “Military Patronage and Hodgson’s Genealogy of State Centralization”, esp. pp. 103–108 (‘What was the Military Patronage State?’).

93 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, pp. 417–419.

the patronage state at its best". This was despite—or rather thanks to—the fact that “the chronicle of the Timurid reigns is even fuller of fratricide and power lust and low intrigue than is most Muslim history in the Middle Periods”.⁹⁴ As for the Ottomans, they appear in Hodgson’s writings as combining the best of these two worlds: absolutist military states marred by internecine warfare combined with local societies blessed by a flowering of, especially, Persianate culture. The fact that the Ottoman polity was “founded in ghazi traditions rather than steppe traditions” meant according to Hodgson that it was organized more coherently around the Ottoman family, its *ghazis* or frontier warriors, and the many resources that the Muslim-Christian frontier had to offer.⁹⁵ For Hodgson the mid-fifteenth-century conquest of Istanbul boosted this solid and integrated dynastic and military core to an imperial level, so that “from a frontier ghazi state, [it] became an absolutism assimilable to the military patronage type, and one of the cultural foci of Islamdom”.⁹⁶ Eventually, in Hodgson’s reading, an absolutist centralizing state arose around the Ottoman court that integrated a wide diversity of social elites, practices and ideas into its stabilized military structures. In Hodgson’s own words, this culminated in “an absolutism in which the whole government—even the imâms of the mosques, as governmental appointees—were regarded as military (*‘askeri*) even though not as ‘men of the sword’ (*sayfi*); and all that was valuable in society at large was regarded as in the dispensation of the royal family and its servants”.⁹⁷

Michael Chamberlain is another historian of Islamic West-Asia who deserves to be mentioned in this overview of the sociological turn in West-Asian studies, despite the fact that he did not engage with the fifteenth century. In fact, Chamberlain is one of the very few scholars who have engaged with the work of both Lapidus and Hodgson and who also thought about the concept of the state. This was done in his work on the organization of elite life in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Damascus and in two later surveys of West-Asian power politics between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.⁹⁸ Chamberlain’s thinking about political organization followed that of his teacher Ira Lapidus in particular in being very consciously and critically informed by contemporary sociological theory. In Chamberlain’s case, however, this involved late twentieth-century post-structuralism rather than systems theory and functionalism.⁹⁹ As

94 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, pp. 490–493 (quotes pp. 490, 493).

95 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, p. 427.

96 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, p. 559.

97 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, pp. 562–563.

98 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*; Chamberlain, “Ayyūbid dynasty”; Chamberlain, “Military Patronage States”.

99 See on this Clifford, “Ubi Sumus?”.

a result, Chamberlain arguably emerges as the most successful representative of this sociologically inspired trend in West-Asian historiography, since unlike Lapidus and Hodgson he was not seduced by the structuralist categories of the dominant legalistic tradition. Chamberlain actually managed to entirely break with that tradition's evolutionary Hegelianism, freeing himself from the recurrent maximalist interpretations of the state in legalistic readings. He was able to think beyond the strict Orientalist categories of a state-(civil) society relationship that should be measured in bipolar terms of strength or weakness, or of the state's failure, or not, to integrate society.¹⁰⁰ Basically, Chamberlain rethought the latter issue that had also haunted Lapidus and Hodgson, namely the relationship between the legalistic appearances of the state and the actual locus of power in 'the Middle Periods': military and other, especially urban strongmen and their kin groups or households. Whereas the two other scholars thought about the changing quality of that relationship in terms of "privatization" (Lapidus) or of "militarization" (Hodgson), Chamberlain radically questioned the validity of this entire relational construct. He actually moved away from the idea of society's 'subalternity' and disruptive 'medieval' empowerment to that of the priority of social practice and the state as a fluid and messy by-product of that practice. This analytical reversal followed the ideas of Norbert Elias and, especially, Pierre Bourdieu, to favor social practice and power as a social phenomenon and moved against the idea of the state as a metahistorical bureaucratic actor. Chamberlain develops this approach most forcefully, and as a tacit correction to Lapidus, in *Knowledge and Social Practice*. Here, he is very explicit about his highly critical and minimalist thinking about the state as a historical concept, explaining that

The state in this period was not an impersonal entity, possessing specialized agencies, capable of formulating long-term strategies to pursue political goals. The politics of the city consisted of continuously renegotiated relationships among the ruling household, the important amirs and their households, and civilian elites with specialized knowledge or religious prestige. If we are to speak of the state at all, it is as an abstraction of the personal ties of alliance, dependence, and dominance among these three groups. Rather than look for the mechanisms by which the state, as the primary embodiment and agent of power, diffused power from the top down, we need to understand a more complex situation. Studies of the bureaucracy, of such entities as the sultanate and the caliphate, of the legal and 'public' aspects of power, are undeniably useful

100 See on the Orientalism of these state-society polarities, Sadowski, "New Orientalism".

in themselves. These, however, do not cover the entirety, or even perhaps the most important part, of relations among power, cultural practices, and the social strategies of groups. Such approaches have been useful in medieval Islamic history only with so much qualification that they lose the very precision they are intended to introduce.¹⁰¹

In *Knowledge and Social Practice* Chamberlain defined the pattern of power relationships that emerges from this analytical turn to urban practice as “a kind of *maladroit* patrimonialism”, and it was through this pattern of personal ties rather than through any state structure that “Ayyūbid and Mamlūk warrior households [...] made political use of existing social, cultural and administrative practices”.¹⁰² In two subsequent studies, Chamberlain further qualified this correction of Lapidus’ functionalist universe through the notion of “*maladroit* patrimonialism” by bringing in the Hodgsonian concept of “the military patronage state”. This happened as Chamberlain was expanding his historical horizon beyond the narrow confines of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Damascus. In so doing he was summarily following in the footsteps that had already led his teacher Lapidus from the Syro-Egyptian focus of his *Muslim Cities* to the global one of his *Islamic Civilizations* and its critical engagements with Hodgson’s conceptualizations of “the Middle Periods”. Chamberlain’s own critical engagements focused especially on how competition, conflict and related social practices helped to better understand Turko-Saljuq and post-Saljuq West-Asia as a meaningfully connected political space. In making this argument, Chamberlain simultaneously expanded the horizon of the concept of a ‘military patronage state’ beyond the spatial and temporal (and structuralist) confines of Hodgson’s Mongol and post-Mongol uses. In his contribution to the *Cambridge History of Egypt*, published in 1998, Chamberlain described how at the time of the late twelfth-century Ayyubids, Egypt also came to share “a number of characteristics with [...] the post-Saljuk Muslim military patronage states”. This meant that “political power was concentrated in, and emanated from, the household (*bayt*)” and that “its political economy was marked by a relatively weak bureaucracy and ruling establishment, partial control of land revenue by horse warriors and religious leaders, indirect rule through religious and military magnates, and parcelized and derived sovereignties”.¹⁰³ His chapter “Military Patronage States and the Political Economy of the Frontier, 1000–1250”, first published in 2005, subsequently engaged along similar, practical

101 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, pp. 60.

102 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, pp. 60.

103 Chamberlain, “Ayyūbid dynasty”, pp. 238, 241.

lines with these post-Saljuq military patronage states in Islamic West-Asia, and with their Saljuq predecessors. In fact, that chapter explained even more clearly Chamberlain's explicitly non-legalistic understanding of Hodgson's 'military patronage state', as he insisted on the fact "that we should not think of the Seljuks as a unitary state, but rather as a collection of powerful households kept in check by the head of the most powerful among them". He furthermore also refined his own earlier minimalist understanding of the state as a so-called 'abstraction' of particular social relationships, claiming that "the ruling household's adoption of monarchical and legal arguments for legitimate authority was one way of fending off the claims of the other households within the ruling family".¹⁰⁴ Chamberlain thus argued that rather than simply being marginalized or regularly broken by social practice's key features of competition and struggle for power (as in a way Lapidus and Hodgson had suggested), the legalistic state was actually reproduced by those features. Like the aforementioned Charles Tilly, Chamberlain thus also believed that "war made the state and the state made war". For Chamberlain at least, the state did so in highly minimalist ways, as an empowering set of ideas of legitimate political order and sovereignty that was part of the tools that were strategically deployed by powerful competing households. "The military patronage state", Chamberlain concludes, "thus permitted the ideal of the universal cosmopolitan empire to survive within a political-economic context that tended towards fragmentation".¹⁰⁵

It remains difficult to gauge the actual impact of these more sociologically inspired approaches of Lapidus and Hodgson, and more recently of Chamberlain, on the different dynastic historiographies of post-Temür West-Asia. A recent survey article of Syro-Egyptian social history identified the enormous impact of Lapidus' *Muslim Cities* in redirecting the field towards the study of informal social networks, urban elites and social equilibrium. At the same time, this survey acknowledged that there has been a lack of critical engagement with Lapidus' systemic thinking. It furthermore questioned the value of Chamberlain's contribution in this respect, claiming that "Chamberlain's Damascus is 'no longer a society', but only a space for elite struggles, and therefore an unsatisfactory model of social action".¹⁰⁶ Even though the latter assessment

104 Chamberlain, "Military Patronage States", p. 142.

105 Chamberlain, "Military Patronage States", p. 152.

106 Rapoport, "New Directions", p. 144; Rapoport took the 'no longer a society' quote from Clifford, but framed it in a far more one-dimensional reading than implied by Clifford, who here was mainly comparing Chamberlain's to Lapidus' notions of 'society'. Clifford actually explained that for Chamberlain "Damascus, in effect, is no longer a society—the locus of social cooperation—merely a social space dedicated to unlimited 'struggle for

is certainly too harsh, especially as far as the invigorating impact of Chamberlain on the study of Islamic knowledge practices and their practitioners is concerned, it is undoubtedly true that scholars today have tended to easily take for granted Lapidus', and also Chamberlain's, more general theoretical concerns, or even have forgotten them, whenever their more specific analytical tools were deployed in contemporary research. This observation of theoretical quietism regarding the state is certainly also valid for many more understandings of fifteenth-century West-Asian state formation, even those that do not engage with Lapidus or Chamberlain at all. Mostly unwittingly, uncritical legalistic readings of the state have arguably remained the norm, not just in modern Syro-Egyptian historiography, but—as Abou-El-Haj suggested—also in work on the Ottoman dynasty, and to some extent even in the arguably more theoretically informed work on Timurid and Turkmen dispensations. As will be demonstrated below, in the latter dynastic contexts, and also in the Ottoman case, some basic organizational principles related to ideas about princely courts, military households and dynastic dispensations, and cultural patronage have certainly been around for a long time, even long before Hodgson modelled them as 'military patronage states'.¹⁰⁷ However, just as Hodgson's own engagement with those ideas continued to be rooted in that legalistic framework, so did most of the engagements of any dynastic specialist with the state in fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. In general, such engagements have therefore restricted their readings of the state to a theoretical quietism that favors merely descriptive accounts of diverse bureaucratic institutions, meritocratic practices and legal norms or of their roles in governing groups, communities and resources. They have prioritized detailed empirical reconstructions of the ranks and careers of dynasts, administrators and courtiers or of how centripetal phenomena expanded or contracted or were reproduced. In short, the dominant question has always remained how states successfully—or unsuccessfully—maximized their relations with, and their autonomy from, West-Asia's societies, without genuinely contemplating the validity and implications of this type of question.¹⁰⁸

social power and status'. And yet, Chamberlain's observation that elite social competition (*fitnah*) was responsive to mediation seems to recognize ultimately a limitation to the radical contingency of social practice and strategy" (Clifford, "Ubi Sumus?" p. 60).

107 See e.g. Barthold, *Ulugh-beg*; Aubin, *Deux sayyids*; Wittek, *Fürstentum Mentesehe*; Köprülü, *Origins of the Ottoman Empire*.

108 Representative, and/or seminal, publications in this respect are, for the fifteenth-century Ottomans: Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*; Inalcik, *The Ottoman State*; idem, *The Ottoman Empire*; Imber, *The Ottoman Empire*; İhsanoğlu, *History of the Ottoman state*; Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*. For the Turkmen and Timurids: Busse, *Untersuchungen zum islamische Kanzleiwesen*; Savory, "Struggle for Supremacy"; Sümer, "Kara-Çoyunlu";

In studying, or simply taking for granted, such specific issues and questions, many of these legalistic readings of state formation in fifteenth-century Syro-Egyptian, Ottoman, Timurid and Turkmen contexts actually quietly adopt an interpretation that considers the process of the endless development of the state in rather structured and linear terms. Interestingly this is at odds with the insights which, as explained above, now appear as mainstream in both the long history of the theoretical study of the premodern state and the study of state formation in late medieval Western Europe. In their maximalist, even absolutist, constitutionalism, these legalistic readings also often impose assumptions of what states do, or what they wish to do or should do, that go far beyond Tilly's interlocking practices of exclusion, integration, reproduction and appropriation. This divergence may well be a function of the West-Asian particularity of these fifteenth-century contexts. At the same time, however, this may also be a result of the lasting impact of a particular generation of historical scholarship in Islamic West-Asian studies that once also made Europeanist readings of the state prioritize a dominant line of thinking that is identified as legalistic here. In any case, as seen above, when detailing the value of Chamberlain's contribution, from a historical and historiographical perspective these interpretations and assumptions are not without their challenges. As Abou-El-Haj also lamented in the early 1990s about Ottoman studies, this is especially true when such approaches are adopted without much critical reflection. Nowadays any active stakeholder in fifteenth-century West-Asian scholarship obviously tends to readily acknowledge many of these more theoretical challenges and their rootedness in some resilient anachronism, or even in "the four sins' of modernist (social) theory: reductionism [...], functionalism [...], essentialism [...], and universalism [...]".¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, it is not easy to provide a constructive response, especially not when the exigencies of the legalistic framework continue to intervene. Making abstraction of these macro-historical challenges in the light of other, less arcane and more down-to-earth matters of scholarly interest appears therefore as an easy escape route for many engagements with fifteenth-century West-Asian history.

Minorsky, "Civil and Military Review"; idem, "The Aq-qoyunlu"; Roemer, "Timūr"; Morgan, *Medieval Persia*, pp. 83–111. For the fifteenth-century Sultanate of Cairo see Björkman, *Staatskanzlei*; Ayalon, "Studies"; Popper, *Egypt and Syria*; Darrag, *Barsbay*; Holt, "Structure"; idem, *The Age of the Crusades*, pp. 178–202; idem, "Mamluk Institution"; Petry, *Civilian Elite*; idem, *Twilight of Majesty*; idem, *Protectors or Praetorians?*; idem, *Criminal Underworld*; Humphreys, "Fiscal Administration"; Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration*; idem, *Délinquance et ordre social*; Igarashi, *Land Tenure*; Meloy, "Economic Intervention"; Meloy, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade*; Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*.

109 Joyce, "The Return of History", p. 212; quoted in Green, *Houses of history*, p. 297.

However, in each of the dynastic historiographies of fifteenth-century West-Asia there certainly also are exceptions to this general tendency of combining legalistic readings of the state with a kind of theoretical quietism. It is worth mentioning a few of these more explicit engagements with the notion of state formation, if only to illustrate how the trans-dynastic sensitivities found in Lapidus, Hodgson and Chamberlain did not operate in conceptual voids. This also serves to show how their more theoretically informed ideas did not go entirely unnoticed, or how these did have at least some counterparts in dynastically oriented scholarship.

3.2 *Defining Early Ottoman 'state formation'*

For Ottoman fifteenth-century history, Hodgson's aforementioned modelling was very much informed by foundational debates among (early) Ottomanists on charismatic origins in frontier warfare, fluid identities and loyalties, and how early Ottoman groups transformed into something more than simple warbands.¹¹⁰ In fact Hodgson's understanding still aptly summarizes the dominant paradigm of fifteenth-century Ottoman state formation. As explained before, this is the paradigm of the rise of a centralizing state around the Ottoman dynastic court, which integrated an ever-wider diversity of social elites, practices and ideas into its stabilizing military structures. In recent decades, one important factor has been interpreted as sparking this fifteenth-century dynamic of centralization and integration, namely the shifting of the balance between the centrifugal forces of marsher lords and old power elites and centripetal forces coalescing around the Ottoman household in favor of the latter, especially after the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed II.¹¹¹ For Cemal Kafadar, this was part of a long process of Ottoman state formation, beginning in the early fourteenth century, and marked by the diversity of social forces and the fluid and mobile relationships that define any frontier, as well as by the local resilience "of sedentary administrative traditions in both the Perso-Islamic and the Byzantine modes".¹¹² On the basis of a critical reading of the ideological and narrative agendas of extant contemporary sources, Kafadar chose to understand this process as that of "a coalition of various forces, some of which were eventually driven to drop out of the enterprise or subdued or marginalized". He concluded that this interaction of centripetal and centrifugal

110 For these debates, see especially Wittek, *Rise of the Ottoman Empire*; Köprülü, *Origins of the Ottoman Empire*; and their reconstructions in Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*; Lowry, *Nature of the early Ottoman state*.

111 İnalcik, *Ottoman Empire*, pp. 13–14.

112 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 140.

mobilities was determined by “the Ottoman success [to harness] that mobility to their own ends while shaping and taming it to conform to their stability-seeking, centralizing vision”.¹¹³

One of the few Ottomanist scholars who have interpreted this more socially oriented understanding of Ottoman state formation through the lens of an explicitly sociological reading is Karen Barkey. Her work provides an ambitious endeavor to better understand ‘the longevity of empire’, the *longue durée* of Ottoman political continuities between the fourteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the Ottoman fifteenth century, Barkey explained that she actually built her novel interpretation mostly on the empirical work presented by Heath Lowry in his *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*. In his analysis of Ottoman state building in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Lowry was working in a dialogue with many Ottomanists, including Kafadar. Above all, Lowry stressed the hybrid nature of the ‘Ottomans’ themselves, and the fact that Byzantine and other Christian elites had become active stakeholders in Ottoman centripetal forces.¹¹⁴ For Barkey, however, “Lowry’s framework lacks a sociological account of how a few men make a revolutionary change in their immediate social relations and transform them into relations of power and influence”.¹¹⁵ Focusing on these relationships and their transformation, Barkey explained that “state transformation then is the resolution of organizational and boundary problems realized in the intermediate zone by state actors and social actors embedded in networks of negotiations”.¹¹⁶ The state in this context is explicitly defined by Barkey with Weber’s “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force over a given territory”, to which however she added “Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the state, where he talks of ‘symbolic violence over a definite territory and the totality of its corresponding population’”.¹¹⁷ Barkey’s analysis is further informed by connecting “historical institutionalism with network analysis, because the mechanisms of institutional continuity, flexibility, and change are embedded in the meso-level network structures that link micro-level events and phenomena to macro-social and political outcomes”.¹¹⁸ With the assistance of these analytical tools, Barkey explained how Ottoman political success is one of flexible and adaptive “brokerage across structural holes”, which offered a means for the successful vertical integration of diverse networks into Ottoman leadership and at the same time the

113 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 140.

114 Lowry, *Nature of the early Ottoman state*.

115 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 32.

116 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 17.

117 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 32.

118 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 17.

horizontal segmentation of these networks so as to maintain Ottoman priority. As far as the Ottoman fifteenth century is concerned Barkey argued that this integration and segmentation took the shape of “‘institutional layering’, which involves attaching new elements onto an otherwise settled institutional frame”.¹¹⁹ More particularly, as a consequence of “the layering of Byzantine and new Ottoman organizations and practices”,¹²⁰ Barkey explained her vision on fifteenth-century Ottoman state formation as follows:

The empire that was built after 1453 became a robust, flexible, and adaptive political entity where a patrimonial center, a strong army, and a dependent and assimilated state elite interconnected with many diverse and multilingual populations ensconced in their ecological and territorial niches. The Ottoman imperial order was to be found in the three components of empire—legitimacy, control over elites and resources, and the maintenance of diversity—each forged through the relations between state forces and social forces, center and periphery, state and regional elites, and central officials and local populations.¹²¹

3.3 *Defining Turkmen and Timurid ‘state making’*

Timurid and Turkmen political history writing is marked by a similar Weberian modelling of co-constitutive relations between state actors and social actors. In fact, among the three dynastic research traditions surveyed here, Turkmen and Timurid historiography is arguably the field which has most explicitly engaged with this paradigm and with the conceptualization of state formation more generally. Hodgson’s qualification of Timurid state formation as a historical process of state-society polarization offers a case in point. His ‘military patronage state’ model describes a successful and culturally efflorescent nomad-urban symbiosis, albeit not a peaceful nor continuous one, operating within an immanent institutional framework of absolutist tendencies. This model is not just widespread in modern Timurid and Turkmen historiography but as suggested above, it is simultaneously rooted in that historiography’s own centennial lineage. It is moreover the object of empirically informed refinements and adjustments by a group of historians who like Hodgson all have some link with The University of Chicago and its intellectual legacies. The work and teaching of John Woods, professor of Middle Eastern history at The University of Chicago,

¹¹⁹ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 71.

¹²⁰ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 72.

¹²¹ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, pp. 67–68.

has been particularly seminal in this respect. In his widely acclaimed *The Aqqyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, Woods engaged empirically with Hodgson's historical model of the erratic empowerment of an apparatus of centralizing power in a volatile context of Turko-Mongol rule and nomad-urban symbiosis.¹²² Importantly, Woods did this by situating his historical work in a carefully considered conceptualization of the "Aqqyunlu social and political structure".¹²³ Central to Woods' understanding of the Aqqyunlu system is "the political and institutional separation and accommodation" which marked the relationship "between the nomadic military elite ('Turks') and the urban elite of eastern Anatolia and Iran ('Tajiks')".¹²⁴ Woods argued that this mix of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies manifested itself especially "in the structure of both the central and the provincial administration" in the format of a division of labor and power, and of "interlocking interests of these two groups".¹²⁵ Identifying this division and interlocking explicitly with the symbiotic "a'yan-amir system as defined by Marshall Hodgson", Woods also echoed Hodgson by suggesting that this "proved to be a remarkably effective mechanism for maintaining order and preserving the fabric of society in the absence of a powerful central authority".¹²⁶ In fact, the latter problem of "absence" is equally central to Woods' understanding of the Aqqyunlu system, as it also was for Hodgson more in general. Just like Hodgson, Woods explained this struggle for "central authority" as a political pattern that was informed by the elite's nomadism, by Turko-Mongol ideas and ideals of corporative power, and by the latter's creative clashes with the absolutist claims of local administrative traditions and individual military successes.¹²⁷ The historical process which emerged from this pattern was one of regular dynastic turmoil and, as

122 Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, p. 10: "the political, economic, and social evolution of the Aqqyunlu confederation from a band of nomadic "cossack" freebooters into a relatively centralized, territorial principality based on a regularized but essentially predatory relationship with agriculture and commerce. ... transform the polity into a traditional Irano-Islamic agrarian empire by gaining physical control of the land and its inhabitants, as well as the centers of commercial activity, by reforming administrative practice to extract maximum economic advantage, by developing a truly symbiotic relationship with the sedentary populations under their rule, and by substituting universalizing Islamic legitimizing principles and institutions for particularistic nomadic ideals, kinship ties, and personal loyalties".

123 Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, pp. 10–23.

124 Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, p. 16.

125 Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, p. 19.

126 Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, p. 19.

127 Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, pp. 19–23.

suggested, erratic empowerment of an apparatus of centralizing power. More precisely, Woods concluded, in general, historicizing terms, that

[i]t is precisely the interplay of these two tendencies among the Aqquyunlu—the centrifugalism or segmentation associated with clan corporateness together with nomadic traditions and the centralizing forces characteristic of charismatic, personal, or bureaucratic concepts of sovereignty—that constitutes one of the major dynamics in both Principality and Empire Periods. Though such systems have been declared explosive and ultimately unworkable, it was precisely this volatility—the continual elimination of entire houses from political contention and the consequent renewal of the sovereign mandate in successive dispensations—that helped the system continue to function among the Aqquyunlu for almost a century. Viewed in terms of the preceding discussion, Aqquyunlu dynastic history must therefore be resolved into a succession of three dispensations to the houses of Tūr ‘Ali, Qara ‘Usman, and Uzun Ḥasan.¹²⁸

These particular centrifugal and centripetal tendencies are explained here as not just being an integral part of a state-society dynamic, but simultaneously as being internal to Turko-Mongol dispensations such as that of the Aqquyunlu. These tendencies re-appear as central building blocks for the highly inspiring analyses that Beatrice Manz has pursued for Timurid political history. In her *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* she focused almost entirely on this internal dynamic to explain Temür’s exceptional political and territorial successes, from his rise to power within the Turko-Mongol Chaghatay tribal formation to his death as the undisputed leader of “a new imperial dispensation”. For Manz, the secret to Temür’s success lay not just in his charismatic personality and his successful “rule through people rather than institutions”.¹²⁹ Above all, his achievement lay in “the careful division and limitation of power”.¹³⁰ Manz explained how Temür managed to de-center Chaghatay nomadic politics, and to defuse the devastating impact of—as Woods had explained—“the centrifugalism or segmentation associated with clan corporateness together with nomadic traditions”, by managing to create an entirely new politico-military elite around his person and around the “charismatic, personal, and bureaucratic concepts of his sovereignty”. This new elite was composed mainly of his “own family and

¹²⁸ Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, pp. 22–23.

¹²⁹ Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, p. 107.

¹³⁰ Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, p. 126.

his personal followers” with their armies, thus subordinating the existing political practices, institutions and elites in and beyond the Ulus Chaghatay under an entirely new, trans-regional political order.¹³¹ This new political order was implemented, fed, and kept under Temür’s control, Manz explained, “by undertaking a war of conquest which kept him and his followers out of the Ulus Chaghatay almost constantly for the rest of his life”.¹³²

Following this remarkable analysis of how war-making and state-making went hand in hand in very particular ways in Temür’s personal politics, Manz studied the reign of Temür’s son and successor Shah Rukh from a similar perspective in her *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran*. In this study, however, Manz expanded her focus to again more explicitly include the state-society relationship that also interested Woods, and Hodgson before him. At the same time Manz engaged critically with some of the assumptions that had informed this bipolar model. Manz mainly argued that the relative absence of war-making during a significant part of Shah Rukh’s reign paradoxically weakened central authority, as this allowed for more autonomous political actors and centrifugal tendencies to reemerge with more power. In this context, however, she explained that any analysis of Timurid politics and state formation should acknowledge the fact that “the towns from which the Timurids ruled their dominions were like an archipelago within a sea of semi-independent regions, over which control was a matter of luck, alliance and an occasional punitive expedition”.¹³³ In this diverse and multipolar, rather than uniformly bipolar, socio-political context, she claimed that “the division between military and civil responsibility and between city and state may have been less marked than [Hodgson’s] a’yān-amīr dichotomy suggests”.¹³⁴ More specifically, power was not the exclusive domain of any one social group or ruler, but was “an individual achievement”. Manz concluded that power “was what one person could make out of a variety of affiliations which sometimes went across the boundaries between military and civil affairs and between the religious and the governmental spheres”.¹³⁵

131 Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, p. 88.

132 Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, p. 89.

133 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 2.

134 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 117–118.

135 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 277. For this diffuse and socially constructed understanding of power, Manz explicitly follows Mottahedeh’s ideas about how different types of ‘loyalties’ (especially, for Mottahedeh, ‘acquired loyalties’ and ‘loyalties of category’) bound people together in power constellations in tenth- and eleventh-century Buyid Iran (Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*).

At the same time, Manz explored the impact of this empowering mix of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies which co-existed within the relational constructs surrounding individual actors, also framed here as a “multiplicity of conflicting allegiances”. She argued that these prevented clear-cut social boundaries from establishing themselves and “thus promoted the cohesion of society as a whole”.¹³⁶ Most importantly for the present context, she explained how this fluid social nature of power “helped to attach society as a whole to the ruling elite”.¹³⁷ For Manz, this in fact almost means that the state-society dichotomy is resolved in favor of an interpretive integration of the state, and of “the practice of politics” more generally, in society. Manz therefore reconceptualized “the central government”—the “Timurid state”, here again identified with the chancery and financial administration and also, in conflicting ways, with military leaderships, dynastic members and their entourages and courts.¹³⁸ She sees that state as “a source of money, employment, status, and military power, which might be converted into political capital within one’s own region or profession” whereas the usefulness and uses on many levels of central government, and even stakeholderhood in government “helped to legitimize it and to further its influence”.¹³⁹ In fact, Manz prioritized these far more fluid and co-constitutive conceptions of center and periphery as an alternative to the traditional state-society paradigm. They proved useful tools to construct more complex and constructive understandings of issues which, as shown above, Woods had also identified in a similar (and contemporary Turkmen) context as “the absence of powerful central authority”. To this end, Manz again ‘de-centered’ power, this time not from the clan to the individual chief, as in her study of Temür, but, as explained above, from the state or central government and the ruler to a multiplicity of individual social actors. At the same time,

136 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 280.

137 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 280.

138 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 13–48, 79–110.

139 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 282. There is a less explicitly theorized but related paradigm that deserves to be mentioned here. It is considered related here despite the fact that to some extent it returned to the state-society binary in the form of Hodgson’s ‘a’yān-amīr system’, reformulated as a court/non-court polarity and interpreting the former with Woods’ dynastic concept of competing ‘dispensations’. This paradigm was foregrounded in the reconstruction of a particular set of political stakeholders by Evrim Binbaş, in the form of a peer-to-peer network of Perso-Islamic intellectuals organized around particular occult knowledge practices who were deeply engaged in early-fifteenth-century Timurid politics as autonomous transregional agents. Binbaş actually argued that as a function of the Timurid state formation process these “informal networks” disappeared as political stakeholders and gave way, in the second half of the fifteenth century, to “formal Sufi networks” to play a part in Timurid politics (Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*).

Manz acknowledged the implications of this conceptual shift. Proposing a far more minimalist understanding of the Timurid state, she considered it as the messy locus of multiple conflicting interests, resources and center-periphery relationships. In line with her archipelago metaphor that already suggests very vividly what this means for her understanding of the Timurid center, Manz advocated a kind of spatial approach to appreciations of Timurid authority and regional control, explaining that “Timurid government represented a spectrum from relatively direct rule over central regions, under princely governors, to a hopeful fiction of suzerainty over neighboring confederations”.¹⁴⁰

Hodgson’s historical model of the erratic empowerment of an apparatus of centralizing power in a volatile context of Turko-Mongol rule and nomad-urban symbiosis arguably continues to linger at the background of Manz’ critical interpretations too. That model is also present in very conscious, yet also very different, ways in Maria Subtelny’s *Timurids in Transition. Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran*. Focusing on the reign of the last Timurid ruler, Sultan-Husayn Bayqara, Subtelny took an explicitly Weberian approach to further conceptualize Hodgson’s notion of the Timurid military patronage state¹⁴¹ and, more generally, “the process of transition and state formation under the Timurids”, which she pitched explicitly as “the process of transition from a nomadic empire based on a booty economy to a state on the sedentary Persian model”.¹⁴² Weberian concepts of personal charisma and its “routinization”, of the traditional patrimonial household state, and of the rational bureaucratic state are Subtelny’s basic tools to analyze this so-called process of transition.¹⁴³ The tension between centrifugal and centripetal

140 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 128. See also p. 111: “Timurid control over society radiated outward from a few major cities, and the level of governmental impact varied widely from one region to another. We can draw a hierarchy of city and regional control, starting with the capital city of Herat, largely dominated by the Timurid court, to the major provincial capitals such as Shiraz and Samarqand, ruled by princely governors heading large armies, then to the secondary capitals like Yazd and Kerman, with governors drawn from among the lesser princes and the emirs, who often came to identify closely with their region. Each governor had at his disposal a provincial *dīwān* and an army of Chaghatay soldiers”.

141 See Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, pp. 40–41: “the court of Sulṭān-Ḥusain Bayqara epitomized what Marshall Hodgson termed ‘the military patronage state’”.

142 See Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, pp. 39, 41 (amongst others).

143 See Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, p. 2; the “routinization of charisma” is explicitly defined here as a historical process “according to which economic factors served as the chief impetus for the reorganization of administrative structures and redefinition of the *raison d’être* of the state”. (p. 15; referring to Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 1121–1123; Chapter 14: Charisma and its Transformation; ii. The Genesis and Transformation of Charismatic

tendencies again appears as the driving force behind her understanding of this process. However, in contrast to Manz' multipolar and minimalist approach and in an interesting parallel to Woods' understanding of "the political and institutional separation and accommodation" between 'Turks' and 'Tajiks', Subtelny interpreted this tension not just in maximalist and almost teleological ways, but also in the strictly dichotomous terms of a nomadic-urban polarity, which at the same time she framed within that resilient framework of legalistic models of the state as follows.

Once set in motion, the process of transition created a dialectic relationship between two basic and opposing tendencies—the one centrifugal, represented by the Turko-Mongolian military elite who wanted to preserve the decentralized patrimonial system and values embodied in the *törä* [Timurid custom]; the other centripetal, represented by the proponents of the Persian bureaucratic tradition who sought to establish a bureaucratic state on the Perso-Islamic model in which the Sharī'a represented the chief ideological basis for centralization.¹⁴⁴

Subtelny argued that this dialectic relationship faltered as "the Timurids would ultimately be unsuccessful in effecting [...] the routinization of charisma", and the Timurid transition from patrimonial to bureaucratic state never entirely materialized.¹⁴⁵ Echoing Woods' suggestion of "the absence of a powerful central authority" in the face of dynastic volatility, she suggested that the Timurid state, as well as its regional successor states, therefore remained stuck in an intermediate stage between so-called Turko-Mongol traditionalism and Perso-Islamic rationalism, conceptualized here as "a patrimonial-bureaucratic regime at best".¹⁴⁶

Authority; 1. The Routinization of Charisma). More generally, Subtelny referred to the Weberian interpretations that were applied by Thomas Allsen to the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Mongol empire and by Stephen Blake to the sixteenth-century Mughal empire as the main sources of inspiration for her reading of fifteenth-century Timurid political history (pp. 2, 33); in many ways, her work may be understood as an attempt to empirically and historically connect the respective patrimonial and patrimonial-bureaucratic models that were operationalized by both authors. This ambition to connect Allsen's and Blake's models also explains her very particular, historicizing, uses and applications of Weber's three ideal types of legitimate authority. (See Allsen, "Guard and Government"; idem, *Mongol Imperialism*; idem, *Culture and Conquest*; Blake, "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals"; idem, "Returning the Household to the Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire").

144 Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, pp. 39–40.

145 Subtelny *Timurids in Transition*, p. 41.

146 Subtelny *Timurids in Transition*, pp. 39, 41, 102, 233. See also p. 8: "The resultant Timurid polity may thus be characterized as resembling more closely the modified Weberian model of the patrimonial-bureaucratic regime that combined a patrimonial household/guard

3.4 *Defining the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate's 'state'*

Unlike in these fifteenth-century Timurid and Turkmen contexts, and to some extent also in Ottoman contexts, most modern historiography of the Syro-Egyptian Sultanate has never really engaged with any of the more sociologically inspired models that have so far been surveyed here. Whereas, as explained above, the writings of Lapidus and Chamberlain have had an invigorating impact in redirecting the fields of Syro-Egyptian social and cultural history, in general this has not happened at all in the field of Syro-Egyptian political history. There, Lapidus' legalistic statist model of a continuous central bureaucratic apparatus that organized protection and exploitation for Syro-Egypt's urban centers and military elites has remained the quiet interpretive norm. This tends to be in direct continuity with conceptualizations of the state from before Lapidus, without really engaging with Lapidus' particular framing of this bureaucratic state as marginalized by urban society due to a so-called "privatization of power".¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Hodgson's model of the military patronage state has arguably not been directly engaged with at all in this fifteenth-century context. This is somewhat understandable, given the origins of this model in Hodgson's readings into Mongol and post-Mongol history and his rather peripheral and therefore also superficial, interest in the Sultanate. What is remarkable, however, is the fact that Hodgson's impression of a very strong state-society polarity—as manifested in his somewhat simplifying claim that "the great Mamlûk amîrs formed an exclusive oligarchy" and "the civilians of Cairo [were] despised and permanently excluded from power"—¹⁴⁸ remains an unqualified assumption in many, if not most, scholarly engagements with the Sultanate's state, its institutions, practices, norms and actors, and their eventful fifteenth-century histories.¹⁴⁹

establishment on the political and military level with traditional Persian bureaucratic and chancery practices on the administrative level". For the introduction of this notion of a 'modified model', see Blake "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals".

147 See e.g. Popper's detailed description of 'Geography' and 'Government' in *Egypt and Syria*, published in 1955, an example from pre-Lapidus times. See also Igarashi's development of "a new framework in which to understand state and society", focusing on "the wide-ranging reforms and financial and administrative reorganization that the Mamluk state underwent during the 14th–16th centuries" in *Land Tenure, Fiscal Policy and Imperial Power*, published in 2015, which is an example of ongoing maximalist assumptions of a bureaucratic state.

148 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 2*, pp. 418, 419.

149 See e.g. Elbendary's interesting argument "for a more nuanced and comprehensive narrative of Mamluk state and society in late medieval Egypt and Syria". She pitches "Mamluk subjects" and "Mamluk rulers" against each other in contexts of socio-economic stress, and interprets this in a kind of one-dimensional parallel to Lapidus' notion of a privatization of power, as moments of political empowerment for the former and of administrative "dysfunction" and "decentralization" for the latter (Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*).

Nevertheless, there are a handful of recent empirical insights that are worth referring to here briefly as promising avenues for further, more sociologically informed, reflection. This overview comes with the caveat that, conceptually, most of these studies equally continued, and continue, to situate themselves rather vaguely within the legalistic tradition's structural models of absolutist bureaucratic power. These recent insights mostly involve the remarkable centralizing empowerment of the sultan's household in the fifteenth century which scholars have seen as a function of its growing socio-economic weight, impact and autonomy and of the changing nature of its agents and their relationships. This approach is present in a survey chapter by Jean-Claude Garcin and also especially in detailed studies by Julien Loiseau and Francisco Apellániz.¹⁵⁰ In *Reconstruire la maison du sultan* Loiseau has an interesting (albeit mainly empirical) way of describing the rise to prominence in the first half of this century of royal household officials and families of administrators ("l'avènement des grands commis civils"). Here he demonstrated how these officials appeared as increasingly autonomous royal household agents and, eventually, bureaucratic leaders, empowered by their success in expanding royal income and investments, ultimately becoming active stakeholders in "a new Mamluk order ('un nouvel ordre mamelouk')".¹⁵¹ Apellániz engaged with a similar model of fifteenth-century central socio-economic transformation. In his monograph *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne* he focused in particular on the "commercialization" of the Sultanate's political economy, with another set of new royal agents and partners (including the Venetians) tapping into new sources of royal income and simultaneously opening up new avenues of political power along parallel old (military) and new (commercial) structures. However, in analyzing this kind of 'layering of organizations and practices' (as the aforementioned Ottomanist Barkey termed this phenomenon of parallel structures in the Ottoman context), Apellániz argued that

150 See Garcin, "Regime of the Circassian Mamlüks"; Loiseau, *Reconstruire la maison du sultan*; Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en méditerranée pré-moderne*.

151 Loiseau, *Reconstruire la maison du sultan*, vol. 1, pp. 179–214 ("Chapitre 4: Refondation de l'état, redistribution du pouvoir: vers un nouvel ordre mamelouk"); expanded in Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, pp. 101–105. These powerful administrators also figure prominently in Igarashi, "Office of the Ustādār al-Āliya"; Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration*; Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo*; Miura, "Administrative Networks in the Mamlūk Period". The related theme of (de-)centralization returns in the writings of Yossef Rapoport and Robert Irwin who explain changes in the administration of justice in similar terms of the expansion of state power (Rapoport, "Royal Justice and Religious Law"; see also Stilt, *Islamic Law in Action*) or of its exact opposite, as privatization (Irwin, "Privatization of 'Justice'"; see also Meloy, "Privatization of Protection").

these generated opposite, decentralizing tendencies towards the end of the century.¹⁵²

Here we see at least an allusion to the challenging analytical horizons of the fifteenth-century Syro-Egyptian process of state formation, from the manifestation of deep socio-economic transformations and a widening political participation to the formation of a new political order and its construction out of variously interacting centripetal and centrifugal tendencies.

The most explicit theorization of these developments is arguably to be found in a joint publication by Van Steenberg, Wing and D'hulster. "The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate? State Formation and the History of Fifteenth Century Egypt and Syria" presents an argument for modelling these different analytical horizons as "the growth of the state, both as a non-dynastic idea of hegemonic political order and as a coercive bureaucratic apparatus that was produced by, and that was set up to reproduce that order".¹⁵³ This conceptualization was inspired by Ibn Khaldun's notion of the sedentarization of nomad power and by Pierre Bourdieu's model of transformation "from the king's house to the reason of state". It sees the changing loci of central power in the fifteenth century as the manifestation of a radical social transformation. This again involved the above-mentioned idea of 'layering', but now in a social rather than institutional way. The range of empowering relationships was expanded during this period from personal service being given to individuals or households to specialized service being offered to the sultan's court in Cairo, and to its agents and local offshoots, and their diverse interests. Further, "The Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate?" suggested that this social layering was "part of a broader development in which the messy paths to power and influence, to a share in the central state's political system, became ever more meritocratic and bureaucratized". The paper also claimed that this involved, almost by default, the performative imagination of that central state in increasingly meritocratic, non-dynastic, and 'Mamluk' terms.¹⁵⁴

In many ways, this theorization of fifteenth-century Syro-Egyptian social transformation (and its 'Mamlukization', as a form of 'meritocratization')

¹⁵² Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance en méditerranée pré-moderne*. This kind of 'layering', or of a parallelism of political structures, was also used as an interpretive framework by Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?*, even though in that context it was rather more negatively represented as a juxtaposition of institutional conservatism and clandestine pragmatism, and defined as "overt institutional inertia" and "covert practical innovation".

¹⁵³ Van Steenberg, Wing & D'hulster, "Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate?-11", p. 561.

¹⁵⁴ Van Steenberg, Wing & D'hulster, "Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate?-11", pp. 565–566, quote p. 565.

builds on various scholars' re-interpretations of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Syro-Egyptian state formation through the lens of elite households, dynastic practices and Hodgson's model of the military patronage state.¹⁵⁵ Van Steenbergen also elaborated on the issue in two more generalizing theoretical essays which complement each other in their respective diachronic and spatial approaches to the theoretical problem of Syro-Egyptian state formation under the Cairo sultans between the thirteenth and early sixteenth centuries. "Appearances of *Dawla* and Political Order in late medieval Syro-Egypt" makes an explicit attempt to connect with the cultural turn in state studies, and with Chamberlain's prioritization of social practice. This essay also pays particular attention to Mitchell's above-mentioned Foucauldian understanding of the state as a structural appearance and "as the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make [actual] structures appear to exist".¹⁵⁶ Following Chamberlain, "Appearances of *Dawla*" proposes a useful way out of the longstanding state-society predicament and the legalistic structuralism that it implied by advocating for an analytical turn towards social practice. It is suggested that priority should be given to exploring practices of reproduction, integration and segmentation among Syro-Egyptian power elites, and that, as Mitchell suggested, this should be coupled with an interpretation of representations of statist institutions, practices and discourses as both structural and structuring effects of what these elites did. This is then suggested to imply that we should accept as an entry point for any historical analysis and interpretation the messy micro-historical diversity of elitist actors and agencies in which these practical arrangements of reproduction, integration and segmentation and their effects continued to manifest themselves. On this basis, "Appearances of *Dawla*" claimed that scholars ought to approach the long history of the Sultanate as a discontinuous one, in which a preponderance of state-making over the messiness of war-making happened only "in contexts of successful, relatively long and charismatic authority". In the long fifteenth century, these contexts are suggested here to have emerged especially during the reigns of the sultans Barsbay and Jaqmaq in the 1430s and 40s, of Qaytbay in the 1470s and 80s, and of Qansawh in the 1500s.¹⁵⁷ "An alternative model for understanding late medieval

155 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*. See also Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks*, pp. 111–124; Bauden, "The Sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad"; Koby, "Mamluks and their Relatives"; Ey-chenne, *Liens personnels, clientélisme et réseaux de pouvoir*; Flinterman & Van Steenbergen, "Al-Nasir Muhammad and the Formation of the Qalawunid State"; Van Steenbergen, "The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State".

156 Mitchell, "Limits of the State", p. 94.

157 Van Steenbergen, "Appearances of *Dawla*", esp. p. 77; see also Van Steenbergen, "Mamlukisation' between social theory and social practice", esp. p. 33.

Syro-Egyptian political organisation that emerges from all this”, this essay concludes more generally,

is then one of sultanic political order—the state—as process, in constant flux as the structural effect and structuring embodiment of constantly changing practices of social reproduction, elite integration and political distinction, in contexts that range between multipolar and unipolar social organisation at and around Cairo’s court and its military elites.¹⁵⁸

Furthermore, in the essay “Revisiting the Mamlūk Empire. Political Action, Relationships of Power, Entangled Networks, and the Sultanate of Cairo in late medieval Syro-Egypt”, a transregional and at the same time socially constructed center-periphery dimension is added to the diachronic model of Syro-Egyptian state formation that was formulated in “Appearances of *Dawla*”. Taking inspiration from, amongst others, Barkey’s aforementioned rethinking of the question of Ottoman longevity, “Revisiting the Mamlūk Empire” suggests thinking of Syro-Egyptian power groups and their patrimonial leaders as different bundles “of diverse but entangled networks, that appear to operate—or present themselves as operating—on a trans-local canvas of connectivity”. However, these networks were “always constructed in the micro-history of people and their negotiation of particular cultural, socio-economic and political relationships”. As a result, these relationships did not just connect central and peripheral elites (as Barkey suggested for the Ottoman case). They also actually constituted different groups, or entangled networks, as such central and peripheral elites, in continuously disputed and reconfigured ways. Furthermore, these particular sets of centering relationships always appeared as “permeable and as crisscrossed by many other, equally fluid, relational realities that seemed to be pulsating from other local or trans-local centers of social, economic, cultural or even political action”.¹⁵⁹

4 Concluding Observations: West-Asian and Eurasian Parallels, Connections and Divergences?

The modelling of the state in fifteenth-century Syro-Egypt as one among a ‘layered’ variety of fluid, permeable and competitive social processes of power,

¹⁵⁸ Van Steenberg, “Appearances of *Dawla*”, p. 78; see also Van Steenberg, “‘Mamlukisation’ between social theory and social practice”, p. 34.

¹⁵⁹ Van Steenberg, “Revisiting the Mamlūk Empire”.

mainly marked out from other processes by its irregular growth and constitutive political effects, certainly connects in multiple ways with some of the Ottoman, Turkmen and Timurid models presented here. It appeals to the view of Ottomanists such as Kafadar and, especially, Barkey who tried to reconceive of the Ottoman state formation process of the fifteenth century with new, or at least more explicitly defined, analytical tools, turning to social relations and networks, center-periphery dynamics, and institutional layering. It also demonstrates interesting parallels with Woods' suggestion of Turkmen discontinuity in the regular "renewal of the sovereign mandate in successive dispensations". It connects even more, in complementary ways, with Manz' understanding of "the practice of politics" in Timurid history, not least with her 'de-centering' of that history and its more minimalist modelling along her archipelago metaphor. At the same time, however, this Syro-Egyptian model perhaps offers an additional way of integrating these particular Ottoman, Turkmen and Timurid models in more entangled, trans-dynastic and West-Asian historical considerations, not just by imagining resource accumulation, war-making and state-making from the perspective of particular, West-Asian practices of reproduction, integration and segmentation, but also by interpreting their effects as a socially rather than a merely geographically constituted process of 'centering' power around various Turko-Mongol elites across fifteenth-century Islamic West-Asia. In other words, this Syro-Egyptian model makes a more explicit call for an interpretive turn to consider shared power practices and to identify more clearly which factors distinguished these shared practices from each other. It invites researchers to consider how the appearance of local coherence and regional difference in the format of Ottoman, Turkmen, Timurid and 'Mamluk' states was the contingent outcome of practical arrangements continuously (and often also violently) negotiated between various and multi-valent groups of in- and outsiders, acting along local, regional or transregional stakes in different parallel, overlapping and intersecting social processes.

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter the aim here was not just to describe the many winding roads of the study of political organization and state formation across fifteenth-century West-Asia and Western Eurasia. In addition to this theoretical contextualization of the present volume and its contributions, this chapter also sought to lay a heuristic ground for meaningful comparison, and for better understanding the parallels, connections and divergences of approaches to fifteenth-century statist appearances in modern scholarship. The rather different research trajectories and interpretive contexts described here certainly offer much food for thought. Some connections and parallels can easily be drawn, even beyond the rather clear-cut epistemological boundaries that separate West-Asian and European research traditions.

First and foremost, there are the diverse impacts of the trajectories of twentieth century social theory. This goes up to postmodern renewed interests in the state, but above all relates to the Weberian paradigm, which regularly re-emerges in more or less subtle ways, and in more or less critically informed contexts. More generally, there are the legalistic or sociological traditions, structural or practical perspectives, and maximalist or minimalist interpretations that appear everywhere as more or less consciously constructed points of conceptual departure and debate. These shared points furthermore include variables such as the state/society polarity, the centrifugal/centripetal dynamic, and the war-making/state-making symbiosis that regularly appear as explanatory tools in a variety of guises. Finally, another parallel emerges through a more particular fifteenth-century Western Eurasian moment of state formation, variously framed as bureaucratization, routinization, imperial formation, an increase in the distribution of statist labor, a lengthening of the chains of authority and agency, an expansion in the ranks of statist stakeholders, or simply as state growth. This obviously represents another parallel within the different research traditions, even though perhaps it appears as such more on an empirical than on any shared interpretive level.

As suggested by the latter observation of interpretive dissonance in a more specific context of fifteenth-century state formation, it must also be acknowledged that these connections and parallels only appear to exist in their most generalizing formulations when their specific uses are abstracted, even within the different West-Asian and European research traditions. Above all it is clear that as far as fifteenth-century state formation is concerned, not much interpretive interaction nor integration of analytical solutions has happened beyond the East-West divide. Even within each tradition, especially the West-Asian tradition, across the diverse political landscapes there are still very few theoretically-informed dialogues. The study of the state in fifteenth-century Western Eurasia thus appears itself as a very 'layered' and 'de-centered' phenomenon, in institutional as well as practical terms. This is obviously a function of the particular historical trajectories followed by these historiographical traditions of state studies, determined amongst others by the different empirical realities, the different sets of research skills, and the different relations with the modern world that mark each tradition. At the same time, this lack of dialogue remains surprising, especially given that there are many parallels which at least on a more general level appear to connect rather than to separate, and which could offer many opportunities for fruitful interpretive exchanges.

Research has thus been conducted on the fifteenth-century state in diverging ways, not just for Europe and Islamic West-Asia in general, but also for many of the different dynastic and proto-nationalist constituents of each

region. That divergence, however, also harbors many opportunities for an enriching exchange of ideas. As argued earlier in this chapter, any study of states and of their impact on human history should internalize the assumption that all statist manifestations are specific. For this reason, they can only be considered as contextually defined exceptions of any ideal type that may be employed for analysis. Rather than trying to reduce that specificity and exceptionality to, prioritize it within, or exclude it from a statist ideal, the priority in comparative research, and, for that matter also in non-comparative historical research, should be to use that ideal to acknowledge for, and to decipher, specificity and exceptionality. Searching for shared conceptual tools to enhance the comparative potential of the Eurasian canvas of empirical historical research as presented in this volume is therefore not just about finding parallels and connections, but rather more about identifying divergence from a shared model.

As explained before, Walter Scheidel regarded Tilly's "model of state formation driven by interstate and class conflict" and by the interplay of war-making and state-making as holding the most promise for comparative research.¹⁶⁰ At the end of this chapter, we want to suggest that future work should integrate Tilly's into a more practical model. This should also be informed by Mitchell's suggestion that states do not make history, but that history makes states, as and when successful social practices of exclusion, integration, reproduction and appropriation start appearing, and presenting themselves, as pertaining to a coherent apparatus of coercion, distinction, differentiation and hegemony. This approach certainly resonates with the particular model of social practices of reproduction, integration and segmentation and their performative centering effects that appeared to connect at least some of the West-Asian modelings reviewed above. Considered together, in a socially de-centered and layered way, as what made states appear across fifteenth-century Western Eurasia, these practices and their effects may well represent a useful touchstone to help identify specificity and exceptionality in the many processes of state formation that defined fifteenth-century Western Eurasia.

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PART 2

*From Cairo to Constantinople: The Construction of
West-Asian Centers of Power*



The Road to the Citadel as a Chain of Opportunity: Mamluks' Careers between Contingency and Institutionalization

Kristof D'hulster

In the weeks following the demise of the Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf Barsbāy in Dhū l-Hijja 841/June 1438, although he was immediately—indeed automatically—succeeded by his son, al-'Azīz Yūsuf, there ensued a struggle for the sultanate.¹ The protagonists here were the amirs Jaqmaq and Qurqumās. Of these two, it was the former who emerged victorious as the next sultan, al-Zāhir Jaqmaq. His opponent, Qurqumās, paid dearly for his failed attempt, and was executed in December of the same year. It therefore appears that in spite of being succeeded by his son, Barsbāy's death sparked off a struggle for the sultanate, and opened up the road to the citadel for a number of Mamluk contestants, all equally eager and seemingly equally eligible to force their way into the citadel and to become the next sultan.

While the short-lived sultanate of the fourteen-year-old al-'Azīz Yūsuf is interesting enough in its own right, my focus here will not be the issue of underage rule and its common conceptualization as a mere stopgap in a faltering political system. In fact, neither this nor any other similar struggle in fifteenth-century Mamluk history will be dealt with in much detail here. The reason why I refer to this episode nonetheless is that it provides the historical backdrop for the question raised in this chapter. My central question here is informed first and foremost by bringing together two seemingly disparate quotations: one in relation to the episode above, taken from Ibn Taghribirdī's chronicle, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira* ("Stars that Shine among the Kings of Egypt and Cairo"); the other is taken from one of the famous speeches or *orationes* of the Roman author and politician Marcus Tullius Cicero, the *De Lege Agraria contra Rullum* ("On the Agrarian Law Proposed by Rullus"). Agreed, it

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is a long way from Ibn Taghrībirdī's fifteenth-century Cairo to Cicero's first-century BCE Rome. Yet, as will be argued, juxtaposing these two quotations nonetheless makes sense, as bringing in the second allows me to problematize the first; and combined, they provide the perfect backdrop for the research question which I will introduce below.

1 From Ibn Taghrībirdī's Cairo to Cicero's Rome and Back: A Sultanate *ex virtute* or *ex officio*?

As already stated, Qurqumās was defeated by Jaqmaq, and his undoing was, in the words of Ibn Taghrībirdī, that *ḥarraka Qurqumās li l-rukūb fī ghayr waqtihi*: the fact that Qurqumās “had made his move untimely” or “at the wrong time”.² This quotation seems clear enough: the “time” Ibn Taghrībirdī was referring to was—obviously—a particular moment in the course of the struggle. Put differently, Qurqumās' problem was not that he was not entitled to make a move for the sultanate but that tactically, he did so at an ill-chosen moment during the struggle. In short, the author was saying that Qurqumās was eligible for the sultanate, just like Jaqmaq, but unlike Jaqmaq was a poor strategist.

However, in light of the second quotation, taken from Cicero's *De Lege Agraria*, another possible interpretation emerges. In his oration, Cicero referred to the Roman *cursus honorum*, a strict sequence of four offices, each attainable only at a certain age, and culminating in the office of *consul*. As such, this Roman *cursus* was an institutionalized course of honors, fixed first by precedence and later codified into a Roman *lex*. In this particular *oratione*, Cicero boasted that he had held each of the four successive offices *suo anno*, “at the youngest possible age”, thus having run through this *cursus* at maximum speed:

(...) I am the only one of all the new men whom we can remember who have *stood for the consulship the first moment that by law I could*,—who have been *elected consul the first time that I have stood* (...) (and) this honour which you have conferred on me, ha(s) been sought by me *at the proper time*.³

2 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 30.

3 The full passage runs as follows: “You will find that those new men who have at any time been made consuls without a repulse, have been elected after long toil, and on some critical emergency, having stood for it many years after they had been praetors, and a good deal later than they might have done according to the laws regulating the age of candidates for the office; but that those who stood for it in their regular year (*quit autem anno suo petierint*) were not elected without a repulse; that I am the only one of all the new men whom we can remember

By bringing into this discussion Cicero's *suo anno* and the Roman *cursus honorum*,⁴ I suggest that we reconsider Ibn Taghribirdī's comment over the 1438 incident, by problematizing the very referential meaning of the author's "time": was he perhaps referring not to a particular ill-chosen moment in the course of the struggle, but to a particular moment in Qurqumās' personal career? That is, was the problem not that Qurqumās was a poor strategist, but rather that he was not entitled to run for sultan in the first place, as he, unlike Jaqmaq, had not yet reached the proper career position to do so? As Cicero would have it, perhaps Qurqumās' run for sultan was not *suo anno*, but "institutionally premature"?⁵

who have stood for the consulship the first moment that by law I could,—who have been elected consul the first time that I have stood (*me esse unum ex omnibus novis hominibus de quibus meminisse possimus, qui consulatum petierim cum primum licitum sit, consul factus sim cum primum petierim*); so that this honour which you have conferred on me, having been sought by me at the proper time (*ad mei temporis diem petitus*), appears not to have been filched by me on the occasion of some unpopular candidate offering himself,—not to have been gained by long perseverance in asking for it, but to have been fairly earned by my worth and dignity. This, also, is a most honourable thing for me, O Romans, which I have mentioned a few minutes ago,—that I am the first new man for many years on whom you have conferred this honour,—that you have conferred in on my first application, in my proper year (*quod anno meo*)" (Latin text : Cicero, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Orationes*, speech 2, chapter 2; English translation: Cicero, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*). See also Wex, "On the Leges Annales of the Romans", and, more generally, Beck, *Karriere und Hierarchie*.

4 Quoting Cicero is not to be read as an implicit claim that the Roman Empire and the Mamluk Sultanate, with their Praetorians and *mamlūks* respectively, converge in this way or any other (see Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 7). There are striking similarities (such as the Roman *tres militiae* and the Mamluk three-tier military ranking of amirs of 10, 50 and 100), yet such superficialities hardly warrant sweeping claims.

Nonetheless, more deliberate comparisons might prove rewarding. Alongside the *amicitia-khushdāshīyya* parallel hinted at by Irwin (p. 89), one could compare, e.g., their commemorative practices, by juxtaposing Roman epitaphs and entries on *mamlūks* in the biographical dictionaries, and exploring the way in which the *cursus honorum* are recorded therein. (See here e.g., Meyer, "Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire"). Turning to the vexed issue of the Mamluk mode of sultanic succession (dynasty vs. tanistry, heredity vs. merit), why not consider the Roman case (an imperial dynasty vs. a "Republican façade", a "de facto monarch" vs. a "de jure princeps")? Didn't Barqūq and Augustus, both "de jure" no more than *primi inter pares*, strive to found a dynasty around their respective households (the *bayt Barqūq* and the *domus augusta*)? Particularly enlightening here is Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors*.

5 Throughout the chapter, "institution" is not to be understood in its broader sense, as a structure of social order, but rather as convenient shorthand for "formal political institution" (cf. Pierson, *Politics in time*, 104). It relates to political offices that come with a "form", be that a diploma, a robe of investiture, a fixed seating or standing positions, etc., "formal" thus being understood, quite literally, as "having an outward form", without implying (yet not precluding) "actual substance". It is not without reason that I prefer to use "formal"

When confronted with the question as to how understand “time” in the given context, I argue that Mamlukologists will most likely go with Qurqumās, the “poor strategist”, and not with Qurqumās, the “institutionally premature” Mamluk. In their eyes, surely Ibn Taghrībirdī must have been referring to an ill-chosen moment in the course of the fight. Surely Qurqumās must have been “allowed” to play the game and run for sultan, just as Jaqmaq. Surely there was no Mamluk *qānūn* or *yāsa*, either written or unwritten, which, as an equivalent to the Roman *lex Villia Annalis*, would have stipulated temporal and institutional constraints on the sultanate. Obviously, this is not to say that Mamlukologists have thus far thought of the sultanate as something fully “unconstrained”, that is, *open to all*. Apart from the obvious numerical constraint (that is, that there can only be one sultan), scholars have rightfully observed that, if one was not the son of a sultan, one had to be a *mamlūk* in order to become one.⁶ So, at the very least, there must have been a “*mamlūk* constraint”.⁷ Writing in the 1930s, Gaston Wiet suggested that there was no other constraint on the sultanate than this broad “*mamlūk* constraint”; and that all *mamlūks* would be equally eligible to the sultanate: “C’est un monde bien étrange que ce milieu des Mamlouks, qui, presque tous, croyaient ‘porter dans leur giberne’ le sceptre du sultanat”.⁸ Finding the pool of eligible Mamluks to be slightly less broad, later Mamlukologists have amended this statement by adding more constraints, albeit still broad and/or ill-defined ones. One commentator, Levanoni, added an “amiral constraint”, stating that all amirs—and thus, by implication, only amirs—were eligible for the sultanate.⁹ Another, Holt, narrowed down the pool of eligible *mamlūks* to “the Royal Mamlūks, and indeed (to) a smaller

(and in the following, as its opposite, “informal”) to other dichotomies found in the literature: this particular dichotomy, far more than the others, leaves open the question as to whether the “form” comes with actual substance or not (i.e. whether it comes with power in its own right or not). As this is precisely one of the questions dealt with here, this is a crucial subtlety. Unlike, e.g., “titular power”, “formal” allows me to label those aspects that I want to investigate in terms of agency, without already attributing some agency to them.

6 Sultan-caliph al-Mustaʿīn bi-llāh (r. 815/1412) is exceptional, in that he was neither a *mamlūk* nor the son of a sultan.

7 This constraint itself is hard to unpack; yet, *prima facie*, it must have subsumed a gender constraint (being male, not female), a military constraint (having a *mamlūk* military training), a social constraint (being part of a *mamlūk* network), and, perhaps, an ethnic/linguistic constraint. For a discussion of the spatial dimension to Mamluk identity, see Garcin, “The Regime of the Circassian Mamlūks”, 310; and especially Loiseau, “L’émir en sa maison”.

8 H. Munier & G. Wiet, *Précis de l’histoire d’Égypte par divers historiens et archéologues: L’Égypte byzantine et musulmane* (Le Caire: Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire, 1932), 11: 238 (quoted in Holt, “The position and power of the Mamlūk Sultan”, 240).

9 Levanoni, “The Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate”, 376.

inner circle of these”.¹⁰ Thus, in the eyes of Wiet, Levanoni and Holt, and arguably, in the eyes of most Mamlukologists, Jaqmaq and Qurqumās, both “Royal Mamlūk” and ostensibly members of their “inner circle”, were equally eligible for the sultanate. Thus, for many Mamlukologists, the sultanate was *not open to all*, but it was at least open to both Qurqumās and Jaqmaq. Qurqumās being the worse strategist of the two, his failure was one *ex virtute*; Jaqmaq being the best strategist, his success was also *ex virtute*. Indeed, Jaqmaq is considered the “Heerkönig”,¹¹ emerging victorious “from the coterie of contenders for the imperials office”,¹² and from the “factional strife (that) remained the key to power”.¹³

Yet, I wonder, is that all there is to the matter? Is the sultanate truly at the mercy of an “institutionalized competition”¹⁴ among all those Mamluks who belong to the “inner circle of Royal *mamlūks*”? Unlike with the Roman *cursus honorum*, are there no more stringent and explicit constraints on the sultanate, be they temporal, institutional or otherwise?¹⁵ Was the *mamlūk’s* age, for example, irrelevant when running for this or that office?¹⁶ Did not his previous

10 Holt, “The position and power of the Mamlūk Sultan”, 241.

11 Sievert, “Family, friend or foe?”, 112, note 159.

12 Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 20. This somewhat disparaging quotation should not be taken as a slight on an otherwise excellent monograph.

13 Levanoni, “The Mamluk conception of the sultanate”, 374. Chamberlain captures this as “political dexterity” (*Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 94: “As *maṣṣabs* [i.e., non-political offices] were not inherited or attained through examination, and there was no concept of a ‘right’ to them, acquiring and holding on to a *maṣṣab* was usually a reward for political dexterity”) while for Petry “adroitness” is the key term (*Protectors or Praetorians*, 79: “an effective, if brutal, system of mobility by merit that rewarded the adroit”).

14 Darling, “Political Change and Political Discourse”, 512. Obviously, this competition can be considered “institutionalized” only when the latter is understood broadly. Hence, this quotation by no means contradicts the gist of the chapter.

15 Another aspect hardly touched upon in discussions on *mamlūk* “career development” is “honor” and its counterpart, “disgrace”. In fact, *ʿizza*, *nāmūs* and related concepts remain grossly understudied, even though they deserve as much attention as (again!) their Roman counterpart of *dignitas*.

16 As Garcin aptly put it, by the fifteenth century, “the initial rhythm of Mamlūk political life (had) much slowed down”, meaning that *mamlūks* “came to power later and later in life”, and, by consequence, those who made it to sultan all “belong(ed) to senior age groups”. (“The Regime of the Circassian Mamlūks”, pp. 293). However, we may suspect this to be a social constraint in temporal “disguise” (i.e., a strong social network), rather than a veritable temporal constraint (i.e., a stringent age requirement for the sultanate). For the (unrelated) issue of the age of sultan-sons, see, among others, Hirschler, “He is a child and this land is a borderland of Islam”; Stewart, “Between Baybars and Qalāwūn”; Van Steenberghe, “Is anyone my guardian...?”.

tenures, their specific sequence and their respective terms matter the least when running for sultan? In all fairness, it must be acknowledged that, perhaps, some Mamlukologists might beg to differ, arguing that Qurqumās' failure makes sense, since the case of Qurqumās versus Jaqmaq is not just one of "institutionalized competition" among institutionally undifferentiated peers. These may have picked up a clue already left by David Ayalon in the 1950s. In his short entry on the *atābak al-'asākir* in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Ayalon stated that the *atābak*

became the most important *amīr* in the Sultanate, his functions (being) much broader than the name of the office indicates. For all intents and purposes he had become the sultan's viceroy [...] It was common, especially in the Circassian period, for him to succeed the sultan on the throne.¹⁷

Working from this observation and from other clues scattered throughout the literature—using information which is more often implicit than explicit and never detailed in any way—these Mamlukologists might have come to think of the office of *atābak* as the key to the sultanate, and might thus add the *atābakiyya* as another, more stringent constraint on the sultanate. For them, it might make sense that Jaqmaq made it to sultan, not Qurqumās. After all, it was Jaqmaq who held the *atābakiyya* at the sultan's death, not Qurqumās! Yet while these Mamlukologists might think of the *atābakiyya* as the key to the sultanate, I believe that even they will be reluctant to recognize this institutional constraint on the sultanate as a rule proper. Qurqumās' failure may make sense, given Jaqmaq's *atābakiyya*, but, surely, neither the former's failure nor the latter's success can be explained *ex officio*! Levanoni and Sievert offer two good cases in point here. In her entry on the *atābak* in the *Encyclopaedia's* third edition, thus updating Ayalon's entry from the first edition, Levanoni does not think of the *atābakiyya* as a rule proper. Instead, she reduces it to a mere advantage: "In such periods of political transition (e.g. the death of the sultan), the *atābak* held an advantage in seizing power over other magnates holding positions in the sultan's court".¹⁸ For Levanoni, Jaqmaq remains first and foremost the "Heerkönig", emerging victorious from the "institutionalized competition" among the "inner circle of Royal *mamlūks*". The same observation holds true for Sievert. On the one hand, Sievert is careful to point out the

17 Ayalon, "Atābak al-'asākir"; idem, "Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army 111", 58–59.

18 Levanoni, "Atābak (Atabeg)".

role of the *atābak*, “one of the old regime’s leading amirs”, who would often become “the real successor”.¹⁹ Yet, in the end, even for Sievert, when a sultan died,

several rivalising factions started to struggle for succession. As each factional leader, usually an amir of the highest rank (...) could only rely on his extended household as well as a number of clients (...) rivalising factions started to form and fight each other until the most powerful and shrewd amir could decide the conflict in his favour (and) became sultan.²⁰

So it seems that, in spite of Ayalon’s cogent observations on the rule of the fifteenth-century *atābakiyya* as an institutional constraint to the sultanate in the 1950s and 1960s, to date these observations seems to have been mimicked at best, downsized or at worst, even ignored. How to explain the apparent reluctance to think of the *atābakiyya* as a rule proper? Why can this only be—at most—a “rule”?²¹

I deal with this question in three successive sections: from “The *atābakiyya* as a “rule”, through ‘A genealogy of reluctance’, towards “The *atābakiyya* as a rule in the making?” As Ayalon’s statement has not been explicated to date, the first section of this chapter outlines the empirical basis that informed his statement, by mapping the “road to the citadel” from an institutional point of view.²² Was it indeed “common for (the *atābak*) to succeed the sultan on the throne”? Answering this in the positive, that there is in fact a “rule”, I then address the question of why this “rule” appears to not have been fully explicated nor considered in its broader ramifications, instead being mimicked at best, downsized at worst. Taking a reflexive turn in this second section, I offer a “Genealogy of reluctance”. That is to say, I explore the reasons why we—myself

19 Sievert, “Family, friend or foe?”, 111.

20 *Ibid.*, 109.

21 In the following, I capture the apparent reluctance to rethink the *atābakiyya* as a rule proper by referring to it as a “rule” with inverted commas. Thus, rather than identifying a verbatim quotation from an author, these inverted commas are used here as convenient shorthand for capturing this reluctance. For such use of inverted commas, known also as scare quotes, see Finnegan, *Why Do We Quote*, 50: quotation marks are “also used for expression an attitude to words, allowing participants to both use words and dissociate themselves from them. They could indicate that the speaker regarded something as (...) ‘a word that isn’t the exact word I want’, or ‘to indicate that they are using a word or phrase that they would not normally use’.”

22 Yalçın uses a similar metaphor when discussing the *nā’ib al-saltāna* in the early Mamluk period (“A path to throne among the Mamluks” [sic]).

included²³—tend to settle with a “rule” (that is, with inverted commas) at most. In the third section, I move “Towards the *atābakiyya* as a rule in the making”. I reflect on the consequences of dropping the inverted commas and explore how this reframing comes to bear on broader processes of institutionalization and state (trans)formation in the Mamluk sultanate and beyond. Following some final thoughts are two supplements: first, an excursus on three further aspects relating to the *atābakiyya*; second, a table of *atābak al-‘asākirs* for the period in question.

While a detailed study of Mamluk career trajectories and their possible constraints is a definite desideratum for future scholarship, it is beyond the scope of a short chapter such as this. For now, I focus on the upper end of the “road to the citadel” during the fifteenth century,²⁴ and on the role of institutional constraints, to the exclusion of temporal ones.

2 The *Atābakiyya* as a “Rule”: An Institutional Reading of Fifteenth-century Mamluk History

In this section, I explicate the pivotal role of the *atābakiyya* as observed by Ayalon and others, by laying out the empirical basis behind this observation. Whereas the inverted commas of this “rule” are dealt with in the following section, here it is the rule itself that is unpacked. Rather than working backwards from the “rule”, I think it wise to work the other way around, starting from the data. I do this by looking at the pre-sultanic careers of Mamluk sultans through a strictly institutional lens, that is, by rewriting these social trajectories as sequences of offices held prior to accession. Do these sequences display a common institutional factor—either in terms of offices held or in terms of their respective chronological order—that moves beyond the sweeping category of being a “Royal Mamluk amir”, and thus add a more stringent constraint on the sultanate? To return to our Roman parallel, was there a Mamluk *cursus honorum*, an institutionally fixed road to the citadel, with clearly identifiable steps

23 In this section and elsewhere, I switch from the first person singular to the first person plural. This “we” is neither indicative of poor editorship, nor is it to be mistaken for a *pluralis majestatis*. Instead, it functions as a *pluralis auctoris*. Far from being a shallow attempt to eschew the more responsible “I” presentation, I use it most consciously for expressing particular understandings that are shared—or so I argue—by myself and other Mamlukologists.

24 As for its lower end, Garcin offers the generic observation that “promotions of grand amīrs generally followed ascending order of rank”, but he does not explicate this any further (“The Regime of the Circassian Mamlūks”, p. 305).

in a sequential order, each of which coming with their own possibilities for further promotion, and crowned as it were by the highest office of all, the sultanate? If there is no such thing, then clearly, Ibn Taghribirdi *must* have meant that Qurqumās was a poor strategist. If there is such a thing, then he *might* have meant that Qurqumās' move was institutionally premature and that he had not ascended high enough up the *cursus honorum* to run for sultan.

Obviously, by reducing the sultans' social trajectories to office sequences, I am making full abstraction of all other data available on these sultans, abundant data that ranged wide in scope (financial means, military skills, piety, charisma, pedigree, ethnicity, networks, physical characteristics, ...), and that—I know all too well—must have mattered. Of all these types of “capital”, to use Bourdieu's terminology, it is arguably “social capital” that has received most attention in recent years. This is deservedly so, for what mattered a great deal—perhaps more than anything else—was the sum total of people whom one could engage/by whom one could be engaged,²⁵ whether by invoking sanguine, marital, patrimonial, *mamlūk*, or some other type of ties. However, it is easy to feel blinded rather than elucidated when confronted with these abundant data on networks and other variables. An obvious way out of such a conundrum is to make abstraction, and this is the approach I take here. Using Algazi's “hands off rule”,²⁶ from all data available I will retain only the sequence of offices. It goes without saying that limiting myself to “institutional data” at the expense of other “extra-institutional data”, comes at a cost. Indeed, rather than a novel or valid paradigmatic “turn”, this could even be seen as an unwarranted and

25 While the concepts of “friend” and “patron” might appear very different to the modern mind (the first one implying “equality” and the second one implying “inequality”), the Mamluks could express both these concepts with one and the same word, *ṣāhib*. This observation immediately reminds us of Mauss' seminal work on *do ut des*, “Essai sur le don” (for which, see, e.g., Algazi, Groebner & Jussen, *Negotiating the Gift*; Rustow, “Patronage in the Context of Solidarity and Reciprocity”; as well as the works of S. Gordon and I. Krausman Ben-Amos). On the Mamluk practice of gift giving, see mainly the publications of D. Behrens-Abouseif, E.I. Muhanna, and M. Springberg-Hinsen. Eychenne (in “*Le bayt à l'époque mamlouke*”, 277–283) offers an inspiring lexico-semantic study of the Mamluk vocabulary of “friendship” and “patronage” (compare to Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations*). A general discussion is given in Nicols, *Civic Patronage in the Roman Empire*, 2.

26 I borrow this phrase from Algazi (“Comparing Medieval Institutions”, 3), who, in another, yet reminiscent context, argues that “(s)ome of the advantages of the focus on institutions would be familiar to any practitioner of the craft of history. Most importantly, it imposes a few useful limitations, a few simple ‘hands off rules’ for comparative historical research: No invocations of mysterious ‘mentalities’ to explain (....) No summary invocations of ‘culture’ as a summary explanation of differences between historical, differentiated societies—not even of culture's older sister, ‘religion’”.

unwanted “re-turn” to the past! This pitfall, however, is duly recognized, and I return to it later on.²⁷

Let me therefore consider, for example, the offices held by sultan al-Zāhir Khushqadam (r. 865–872/1461–1467) prior to his accession.²⁸ Some time after being imported into the Egyptian domains in 815 or 816, aged 8 or 9, Khushqadam was purchased by sultan al-Muʿayyad Shaykh, thus becoming a *mamlūk kuttābī*. Being then manumitted by Shaykh, he made it to *mamlūk sultānī*. In 824, under the short reign of Shaykh's son, al-Muẓaffar Aḥmad, Khushqadam rose to the rank of *khāṣṣakī*. During the sultanate of al-Zāhir Jaqmaq, Khushqadam steadily kept climbing the ranks, moving from *sāqī* in 842, through *ra's nawba* and *amīr* of 10 in 846, and *amīr* of 100 in Damascus in 850, up to *ḥājib ḥujjāb* and *amīr* of 100 back in Egypt in 854. In 857, at the onset of his sultanate, al-Ashraf Īnāl appointed him as *amīr silāḥ*. Immediately following the sultan's death in 865, the latter's son-successor, Aḥmad b. Īnāl finally appointed the 58 year-old Khushqadam as *atābak al-ʿasākīr*. At last, some four months later, *atābak al-ʿasākīr* Khushqadam was able to oust the sultan-son al-Muʿayyad Aḥmad, and to seize the sultanate himself.

It is thus clear that Khushqadam's last pre-sultanic office was that of *atābak al-ʿasākīr*. As for the office itself, commonly translated as “commander-in-chief of the armies”, it is not necessary here to explain either its origins or its duties and prerogatives.²⁹ Suffice to say that on the whole, the *atābak* had no duties “except those of leading the armies in action” (and in this capacity he could be replaced by the *muqaddam al-ʿasākīr* or “(acting) commander of the armies”), and, generally, “sitting on the sultan's advisory council”.³⁰ What is interesting about the *atābakiyya* in the present context is the fact that this was the last pre-sultanic office held by a significant number of sultans in the period in question here (815/1412–901/1496, from al-Muʿayyad Shaykh, r. 815–824/1412–1421, up to al-Ashraf Qāytbāy, r. 872–901/1468–1496). Out of a total of fourteen

27 See Pierson's observations on the role of prior expectations in research and on the need to “think through these” explicitly and carefully (*Politics in Time*, 7).

28 Succinctly presented by Ibn Taghrībirdī (*Nujūm*, 7: 687–689).

29 See ʿAbd al-Jawād, “Atābak al-ʿasākīr fi l-Qāhira” (*non vidi*); Ayalon, “Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army—II”, 58–59 and 81–85; idem, “Atābak al-ʿasākīr”; Holt, “The structure of government in the Mamluk Sultanate”, 53–55; Levanoni, “Atābak (Atabeg)”; and Popper, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans*, 90–91. Cahen (“Atabak”) provides a general aperçu, while Eddé (“Quelques institutions militaires ayyoubides”, 163–174) deals with its Ayyubid precursor. References to the administrative manuals of al-Qalqashandī, al-ʿUmarī and al-Zāhirī can be found in these titles.

30 Popper, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans*, 90–91.

sultans,³¹ no less than eight had moved directly from the *atābakīyya* to the sultanate: Shaykh, Jaqmaq, Īnāl, Aḥmad b. Īnal, Khushqadam, Yilbāy, Timurbughā, and Qāyrbāy.³² As such, these eight sultans followed a precedent created by al-Zāhir Barqūq (r. 784–791/1382–1389 and 792–801/1390–1399), who, from his position as *atābak al-ʿasākīr*, deposed the last puppet-sultan of the Qalāwūnid household in 784/1382, and subsequently proclaimed himself sultan.³³ The empirical data thus confirms the “rule” of the *atābakīyya*: as David Ayalon had already observed for the first time in the 1950s, clearly this office was indeed the key to the Mamluk sultanate.³⁴ As already stated, the inverted commas of this “rule” will be examined in the next section. Before doing so, however, it is worthwhile to first elaborate on this “rule” by taking a closer look at the list of the *atābak ʿasākīrs* for the period under scrutiny, tabulated at the end of this chapter.³⁵

First, it appears that, as a “rule”, sultans are succeeded by their last *atābak*. For example, sultan al-Mustaʿīn is succeeded by his *atābak* Shaykh, Yūsuf b. Barsbāy by Jaqmaq, and Timurbughā by Qāyrbāy. So the *atābakīyya* appears to have been the institutional key par excellence to unlock the gates of the citadel. The sources do in fact confirm this intimate link between the *atābakīyya*

31 One should keep in mind that, of the total of 14 sultans, 5 were sultans-sons, who, as such, operated outside of the Mamluk *cursus honorum*. See the table for more details.

32 Of the many references, the most apt are Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 323, 7:423, 764, 822, 825, 849, 865; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 9: 58. The fact that Ibn Taghrībirdī’s father himself was the *atābak* just before the period in question (810–813/1407–1410) adds an interesting psychological dimension.

33 This is not to say that the office of *atābak* was not important before Barqūq. On the contrary, already before this time *atābaks* were often effectively the strongest of the Sultanate (think for example of Qalāwūn, *atābak* of sultan Salāmish b. Baybars in the 1270s). Yet, unlike *atābak* Barqūq, Barqūq’s predecessors continued to function under the legitimizing institutional umbrella of a Qalāwūnid dynasty, rather than claiming the institutional highest authority for themselves.

34 Brinner (“The struggle for power in the Mamlūk state”) correctly identified the move of Barqūq from *atābak* to sultan as a pivotal moment in history of the former office. Thus ending “the fiction that had grown up around the title of sultan”, Brinner continues, Barqūq had also “destroyed the significance of the office of the *atābak* so that thereafter it was essential for an ambitious amir to seize the sultanate for himself”. (“The struggle for power in the Mamlūk state”, 233–234). Somewhat carelessly worded, this statement may hence be easily misunderstood. Undoubtedly, what Brinner wanted to convey was not that the *atābakīyya* itself had become irrelevant, but rather that the *atābakīyya* ceased to be the highest office a *mamlūk* could aspire to obtain.

35 The number of references in the table has been kept to a minimum, and the dates are as accurate as possible. As for sultans’ sons, only those who made it to sultan are included, and their ages are given only when relevant. As for vacancies, only the longer ones are indicated explicitly, while the shorter ones can be inferred from the gaps in dates.

and the sultanate. Immediately following sultan Yilbāy's appointment of Timurbughā as *atābak*, "everybody was convinced that the power would eventually come to Timurbughā, and thus it happened (*taḥaqqāqa kull aḥad anna l-amr ya'ūl ilayhi fa-kāna*)".³⁶

A second observation relates to those cases where a "sultan-son" is involved. If a late sultan has a (grown-up) son, it appears that the same principle holds, only this time operating at an interval. First, the sultan is succeeded by his son. This sultan-son's sultanate, however, is short-lived and before long, he is ousted by the *atābak* whom he "inherited" from his father along with the sultanate. Barsbāy, for example, is succeeded first by his son, Yūsuf, who is subsequently succeeded by their joint *atābak*, Jaqmaq. A second case in point is the sequence of sultan Jaqmaq, his son 'Uthmān and their joint *atābak* Īnāl.³⁷ Thus rewriting the "rule", I might say that sultans are succeeded by their *atābak*, either immediately, if there is no son, or after a short interval, in case there is one.³⁸

Admittedly, even when rewritten, this "rule" has its "exceptions": three to be precise. Yet, as I argue, far from invalidating the "rule", these exceptions corroborate the importance of the *atābakīyya*. First, there is the succession of sultan Īnāl by his son, Aḥmad, in 865, exceptional in that Aḥmad was both the sultan's son and his *atābak*.³⁹ As a matter of fact, al-Ashraf Īnāl appointed his son and future sultan, Aḥmad, twice as *atābak*. The first time he did so

36 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 848–849.

37 As appears from the list, Khushqadam, Yilbāy and Timurbughā were not succeeded by a son. This may be due to the fact that they didn't have a son when they passed away (in fact, only Khushqadam appears to have had one, aged 5 at the time of his father's death), or because, by then, the sultans had come to realize that succession by a son (even as a mere stopgap) was no longer an option. Either way, this discussion has little bearing on the present question.

38 As already stated, the sultanate of sultan-sons lies outside the scope of this chapter.

39 This is exceptional in that Aḥmad appears to be the only sultan-son who was *atābak* at the time when the father-sultan died. Already in the 820s, al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh had turned to this same "institutional ploy", appointing his choice son, Ibrāhīm, as *atābak*. In that case, however, the son did not outlive his father but he passed away, aged 23, some 6 months before Shaykh himself. As *atābak*, Ibrāhīm was succeeded in office by a *mamlūk*, Aḥṭunbughā al-Qurmushī (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk* 4: 477, 517; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 476; al-'Aynī, *Iqd*, 1: 231). As sultan, Shaykh was succeeded for some 8 months by another son, al-Muẓaffar Aḥmad, aged "1 year, 8 months and 7 days" at the time of accession (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 563).

Perhaps, Jaqmaq had appointed his son 'Uthmān, the future sultan, as *atābak* as well, but the evidence is limited to one single (?) reference to the latter's tenure, in the list of officeholders at the beginning of 857 as recorded in Ibn Taghrībirdī's *Ḥawādith* (see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 237, note 1: "The *atābak al-'asākir* is Īnāl al-'Alā'ī al-Nāṣirī (i.e., the future sultan), and (*wa*) his Excellency al-Fakhrī 'Uthmān, son of sultan (Jaqmaq)"; see also Sievert, *Der Herrscherwechsel im Mamlukensultanat*, 124).

immediately following his own accession in 857. Yet, tellingly, this appointment was met with growing unease, and the very next day Īnāl felt obliged to rescind his son's appointment.⁴⁰ As Ibn Taghrībirdī explains:

The appointment of the sultan's son to the position of *atābak* is an offense against common usage (*min kharq al-'awā'id*), for we haven't heard of any of the rulers' sons befalling that (...) The appointment troubled the people (*shaqqa dhālika 'alā l-nās*). The sultan got word of that and he then set right his faux pas (*fa-stadraka farṭahu*), removing his son and appointing Tanībak instead.⁴¹

Five years later on, however, in 862, Īnāl was in a strong enough position to reappoint his son as *atābak* and to get away with it. In the same chronicler's words,

At a time when the sky had become cloudless for the sultan, he finally achieved what he had aimed at all along (*mā kāna fī gharāḍihī*), without anyone contending, without word or talk (*min ghayr munāzi' wa-lā kalām wa-lā qāla*).⁴²

This time, Aḥmad remained in office until his father died, and then progressed directly from *atābak* to sultan. What should we make of these two appointments? First, it is clear that Īnāl was acutely aware of the fact that, by then, the dynastic principle of sultanic succession had yielded to a *mamlūk* principle, with "royal blood" no longer a match for a "mamlūk identity". Second, and more specifically, he fully recognized the *atābakiyya* as the key element to the sultanate's new reality. As he hoped for his non-*mamlūk* son to truly succeed him, thus going against precedent, he thought he could enhance the latter's chances by appointing him *atābak*, thereby—perhaps advertently—"mamlūkizing" him.⁴³ In the end, Īnāl's "institutional" efforts were nonetheless to no avail, as just four months later Aḥmad was deposed by his own *atābak*, the *mamlūk* Khushqadam. Ibn Taghrībirdī was somewhat caught by surprise over the quick downfall of al-Mu'ayyad Aḥmad:

40 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 425–426.

41 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *ḥawādith*, 318.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Jaqmaq appointed his son, 'Uthmān, as *atābak* because, according to Sievert, "he did not want to burden him with an inherited sultanate" (*nicht mit dem "Makel" des ererbten Sultanats belasten*) (*Der Herrscherswechsel im Mamlukensultanat*, 124).

Al-Mu'ayyad [Aḥmad]'s reign came to an end most quickly, as if it had never been (...) in spite of the large numbers of his dependents (*ḥawāshī*), his vast possessions and the fact that he was [deemed] exalted in the souls of men (*'aẓamatihī fī l-nufūs*), as opposed to the other sons of rulers who had become sultan (*al-mustaltīnīn min awlād al-mulūk*) (...) and [in spite of] the fact that he had been made *atābak* in the days of his father, for all sons of rulers who were deposed [from the sultanate] were time and again overcome by [the one who occupied] the office of *atābak* (*fa-inna kull man khulī'a min awlād al-mulūk mā ukhidha illā min jihat al-atābakiyya*), but this [man's] father had not had any other *atābak* than his son.⁴⁴

Hence, rather than an exception, this particular succession episode is a corroborating variation to the "rule" of the *atābakiyya* as the key to the sultanate.

A somewhat bigger challenge is posed by the two other cases, the successions of Aḥmad b. Shaykh by Ṭaṭar in 824, and that of Muḥammad b. Ṭaṭar by Barsbāy in 825. These cases are exceptional in that here the sultan-sons are not succeeded by their respective *atābak*, whom they had "inherited" from their father. Instead, their *atābak* appears to have been "overruled" in his "claim" to the sultanate by another official, the *nizām al-mulk* or "regent". Unlike the *atābakiyya*, this was an occasional office given by a sultan to an amir in case the sultan-son was still underage.⁴⁵ From an institutional point of view—that is, in light of the "rule" established above—it would make sense for this occasional office to be combined with that of *atābak*, and indeed, Shaykh, Jānibak al-Ṣūfī and Jaqmaq⁴⁶ combined the two offices. The cases of Ṭaṭar and Barsbāy, however, are the only examples in which the two offices were split rather than combined. First, under the sultanate of Aḥmad b. Shaykh in 824, Jānibak al-Ṣūfī held the *atābakiyya*, while Ṭaṭar was the *nizām al-mulk* of the sultan-son. The next sultan turned out not to be the sultan-son's *atābak*, Jānibak, but his *nizām al-mulk*, Ṭaṭar. Second, under the sultanate of Muḥammad b. Ṭaṭar in 825, Jānibak first combined the *atābakiyya* and the office of *nizām al-mulk*. Yet,

44 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith*, 396–397.

45 See Popper, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans*, 90.

46 Jaqmaq is only referred to as the *mudabbir al-mulk* of Yūsuf b. Barsbāy, and not as his *nizām al-mulk* (Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 4: 279), but I assume that the titles have become interchangeable by that time (the fact that Ṭaṭar, Jānibak and Barsbāy all held the two titles simultaneously might explain the confusion). Thorough research that disentangles the offices of *mudabbir al-dawla*, *lālā*, *nizām al-mulk*, *atābak*, and the elusive *amīr kabīr* remains a major desideratum in the field (see, among others, Levanoni, "The Mamluk conception of the sultanate", 383–384).

the ‘jack-in-the box’ Barsbāy appeared on the scene and “finished him off institutionally”, by himself becoming the the *nizām al-mulk*, and passing on the office of *atābak* to Ṭarabāy al-Zāhirī. In the end, it was *nizām al-mulk* Barsbāy who succeeded sultan Muḥammad b. Ṭaṭar, and not the former *atābak*-cum-*nizām al-mulk* Jānibak or the later *atābak* Ṭarabāy. So, it appears, if the offices of *nizām al-mulk* and *atābak* are split, it is the *nizām al-mulk* who “overrules” the *atābak*. In relation to these last two episodes, there is a telling confusion in the sources regarding the offices held by the protagonists. In four instances, the *nizām al-mulks* Ṭaṭar and Barsbāy are referred to as *atābak*. Ṭaṭar is referred to like this three times, all by Ibn Taghrībirdī.⁴⁷ In his *Nujūm*, for example, the author stated that “the length of (Ṭaṭar’s) rule, since the death of al-Malik al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh until he himself died, was eleven months minus 5 days, of which ninety-four days as sultan and the remainder of which as *atābak*” (*wabāqī dhālika ayyām atābakiyyatihi*).⁴⁸ In the *Manhal* entry of Ṭarabāy al-Zāhirī, Ibn Taghrībirdī stated that “al-Malik al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh died in the year 824 and his son al-Malik al-Muzaffar Aḥmad Abū l-Sa’āda became sultan after him [while] Ṭaṭar became his *atābak* and *nizām al-mulk*”.⁴⁹ As for Barsbāy, he seems to be referred to as *atābak* only once. According to Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, while on his deathbed al-Zāhir Ṭaṭar had designated his son Muḥammad as his successor and had appointed *al-dawādār al-kabīr* Barsbāy as the *atābak al-‘asākīr*.⁵⁰ Apart from these four references, however, there is no further explicit proof of either Ṭaṭar or Barsbāy being appointed *atābak*, and, consequently, there is little reason to assume that they actually held this office.⁵¹ Why then are they still referred to as such? If anything, these references are clear proof of the utmost importance of the *atābakīyya*, and of its intimate link both with the sultanate and with the office of *nizām al-mulk*. Both Ṭaṭar and Barsbāy had been the *nizām al-mulk* to the sultan-son, and both eventually made it to become sultan; surely, both of them must therefore have also been *atābak*, or—if not—might still be referred to as such, as an authorial lapsus! Leaving the office of *nizām al-mulk* out of the discussion, one might say that, in a way, the

47 The third reference, not given here, is Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 619–621.

48 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 517.

49 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 6: 373–378.

50 Ibn Ḥajar, *Imbā’*, 7: 425–426.

51 Not only the small number of references is suspicious, but also the context in which these references are found: mostly capsule biographies and obituaries, and not the day-to-day historiographical recordings. Moreover, for exactly the same timeframe, we find references to other *atābaks* that are both more numerous and more explicit (see the table at the end of this chapter). Of course, ultimately, if these suspicions were found to be unfounded, this would only corroborate my basic argument.

connection between *atābakiyya* and sultanate was so strong that it worked “retro-actively”. For, if as a “rule”, *atābaks* become sultans, then all sultans (sultans-sons excepted) must have been *atābak* prior to accession!

Recapitulating this section, I have thus far outlined the empirical basis of Ayalon’s generic statement, thus demonstrating the “rule” of the *atābakiyya*. Indeed, some exceptions notwithstanding, it is the *atābak* who becomes the next sultan. This “institutional turn” now needs to be followed by a “reflexive turn”: why, in the face of empirical evidence, are we⁵² Mamlukologists reluctant to explicate this “rule” and to consider its broader ramifications? Why do we reiterate it at best, and downsize or omit it at worst? Why are we reluctant to drop the inverted commas of the “rule” and to think of it as a rule proper instead?

3 A Genealogy of Reluctance: The Circularity of Informality, Networks and Contingency

In the preceding section, I have demonstrated the potential of a strictly institutional reading as a useful and valid tool. For one, it “suggests” insights which are easily confirmed by extra-institutional data. The fact that Īnāl, for example, twice appointed his son as *atābak* strongly suggests that he sincerely hoped that his son would succeed him. Indeed, Īnāl’s fatherly concern can be traced extra-institutionally as well. Moreover, not only does an institutional reading suggest or confirm extra-institutional data, it elucidates this as well, by adding novel and surprisingly clear-cut insights. Apart from suggesting that Īnāl wanted to see his son succeed him, the institutional reading clearly spells out one of the strategies to which the father-sultan turned in order to achieve this: a strategy of institutional *mamlūkization*. To take another example, from an institutional perspective, the split tenure of *atābakiyya* and *niḏām al-mulk*, involving Ṭaṭar and Barsbāy (as opposed to the combined tenure by Shaykh and Jaqmaq), seems to spell doom, and indeed, the chronicles portray these two sultanic successions as particularly messy and protracted. The case of Jānibak al-Ṣūfi is especially revealing in this respect: from an institutional perspective, al-Ṣūfi’s defeat at the hands of Barsbāy is surely one of the bitterest ones throughout Mamluk history.⁵³ At one point, all institutional odds were with Jānibak, and against Barsbāy: it was Jānibak who combined the offices of

52 On the conscious use of this *pluralis auctoris* here and in the following section, see above.

53 For a biography, see Adriaenssens & Van Steenbergen, “Mamluk authorities and Anatolian realities”.

atābak and *nizām al-mulk* to ʿAṭāʿ’ son, it was he who was to be next sultan! Yet, against all institutional odds, in 1422 he ended up not in the throne hall of the citadel, but first as a refugee in Anatolia, and, finally, in 1438, as a severed head, stuck on a spear and paraded before sultan Barsbāy. What a turn of luck, if there ever was one! Of course, this particular story does not become nonsensical if we leave aside its institutional dimension. Yet, one must agree, the bitterness of Jānibak’s defeat and the fact that, in spite of this defeat, he remained Barsbāy’s nemesis for many years become all the more clear by adding the institutional dimension as another useful layer of interpretation.

Yet, admittedly, however suggestive or elucidating an institutional reading may be, it has its obvious limits. Think for example of the bitter defeat of Jānibak at the hands of Barsbāy: while an institutional reading allows us to fully appreciate its bitterness, it falls short of explaining *how* this could happen or *why*. How could Barsbāy, a “mere” *dawādār kabīr*, “institutionally finish off” Jānibak, the *atābak-cum-nizām al-mulk*, and gain the sultanate for himself? A second example is the cases of Yilbāy and Timurbughā: both were *atābak* to the previous sultan and as expected they did in fact become sultan. Yet, how come they were unable to remain in that position? While I argue that institutions did matter and that, in fact, there were institutional constraints to the sultanate that moved beyond the sweeping category of “Royal Mamluk amirs”, it is clear that these facts cannot possibly tell the whole story. Hence, the time has come to bring in the extra-institutional data which so far has been missing from the discussion. By doing so, I will explicate some of the underlying assumptions that, in my view, inform our understanding of fifteenth-century Mamluk socio-political culture. These assumptions,⁵⁴ so I argue, lead to the ascendance of network analysis at the expense of institutional history, to the primacy of historical contingency at the expense of diachronicity, and, ultimately, to the rise of “rules” at the expense of rules proper.

When bringing in the extra-institutional data, the question arises as to whether the institutional and the extra-institutional⁵⁵ relate to one another, and if so, how. While the question of *whether* these two were related is readily answered in the affirmative by Mamlukologists, we seem to find the question of *how* this interrelation worked, however, much harder to answer. Especially for the fourteenth century, quite a few authors such as Chamberlain, Clifford and Van Steenberghe have grappled with this question. As I see it, their various

54 Or, as Charles Tilly would put it, “pernicious postulates” (see Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, 11).

55 “Extra-institutional” means “all that is not institutional” (itself a shorthand, it will be recalled, for “formal political institutional”).

understandings share first and foremost a dichotomous conceptualization of the institutional and the extra-institutional,⁵⁶ being referred to as “nominal” and “factual”,⁵⁷ “titular power” and “actual power”,⁵⁸ “legitimate power” and “effective power” (being the “two sides of the same coin”),⁵⁹ or “monetized honour” and “political dexterity”.⁶⁰ In fact, such dichotomous understanding is not alien to the sources, where it is rendered by the pair of *ism*, litt. “name”, or *ḥiss*, litt. “sound”, vs. *ma'nā*, litt. “meaning”. For example, someone might be said to be an *ustādār* “nominally” only, the “factual” *ustādār* being his *ustādh* (*wa-waliya l-ustādāriyya ḥissan wa-ma'nāhu ustādhihi*).

Ideally then, either side of the coin could serve as a proxy for the other, thus allowing us to use the “nominal side” to talk about the “factual side” and vice versa. In reality, however, we have found that the two sides of the coin don't. The sources sometimes refer to “institutional bubbles”. In the most flagrant cases, the “two sides of the coin” have gone out of sync, and individuals are explicitly said to be in power *mujarrad al-ism*, *isman*, *bi-l-ism* or *ḥissan*, “in name only, nominally, in a titular manner”, while the *ma'nā* or “factual power” of their office resides with somebody else.⁶¹ Often, however, such cases are not marked explicitly. Barsbāy vs. Ṭarābāy is a good case in point here: while none of the protagonists are explicitly said to be in power *mujarrad al-ism* only, the sources do portray the gradual build-up of an “institutional bubble” and the losing party's growing unease over this fact.⁶² However marked, what we take

56 Hereby not implying that the various authors conceptualize these dichotomies in identical ways.

57 Brinner, “The struggle for power in the Mamlūk state”, 232.

58 Stewart, “Between Baybars and Qalāwūn”, 47 (with reference to the “potestas/nomen debate”).

59 Van Steenberg, *Order out of Chaos*, 6–7. Alternatively called “institutions” or “the institutional framework” versus “the individuals that populated them” or “(socio-political) practice”.

60 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 92, 94. Himself dealing with non-political offices, Chamberlain recognizes the same mechanics at work for political offices.

61 Using *ism*, litt. “name”, said for example of caliph al-Mu'taḍid bi-llāh (*wa-laysa lahu min al-khilāfa illā mujarrad al-ism*), of sultans Muḥammad b. Ṭaṭar, Yūsuf b. Barsbāy, and Yilbāy (*ṣāra huwa sman fi l-saltana wa-l-ma'nā li Khayrbak*, the “factual sultan” being Khayrbak), and of *kātib al-sirr* Muḥibb al-Dīn b. al-Ashqar (*bi-l-ism lā ghayr*) (al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 677, 1078; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 839, 838; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Ḥawādith*, 297, 610, 614; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī al-Zuhūr*, 2: 79).

62 See for example Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 537–538. Following the death of Ṭaṭar and the joint removal of Jānibak by Ṭarābāy and Barsbāy, thus clearing the road to the citadel, these two protagonists had agreed that “the control of the government would be divided between them equally, and that no one would get preference over the other in any matter”.

from these cases is that while they may be interrelated, the interface that links them is not transparent and synchronous, but rather opaque and a-synchronous. Ideally, the “nominal side” would “name” “factual” power relations synchronously (that is, fully in sync with factual power relations) and transparently (with neat one-on-one correspondences). In reality, however, it seems to do so a-synchronously (that is, out of sync with factual power relations), and opaquely (that is, without neat one-on-one correspondences).

Conceptualizing the relation of the institutional and the extra-institutional as a dichotomy with a vexed interface, however, comes with serious consequences. First, when we understand institutions as little more than opaque, out of sync or inferior alter egos to extra-institutional power, the question arises as to why one should study “institutions” in the first place. Finding this question difficult to answer, we Mamlukologists have tended to acquiesce to the old saying that it is first and foremost “the man who makes the office honourable, not the office which dignifies the man”. Indeed, while we may still see these two sides as alter egos, eventually we settle on the extra-institutional side of things as the “superior” one.⁶³ As Chamberlain formulated this programmatically:

Once we look for practices and strategies rather than institutions and rules, at the strategic rather than the taxonomic, we are in a much better position to exploit (politics and social life).⁶⁴

Directing our attention there obviously comes at the expense of all things institutional. A second consequence which ensues from the first is that we have

Before long, however, and in spite of their gentlemen’s agreement—indeed, in violation of it—, ʿArabāy found himself next in line to be institutionally caught up by his onetime brother-in-arms. A bubble started to build, as the dexterous *niẓām al-mulk* Barsbāy gradually accumulated ever more factual power, draining this from *atābak* ʿArabāy and thus disturbing the carefully negotiated balance of power. By the time that ʿArabāy had “come to realize that the situation was the opposite of what he had hoped for”, the bubble had grown too large and was readily pricked by Barsbāy.

63 While Van Steenbergen readily acknowledges their interrelatedness and stresses the fact that neither can be properly analysed without the other, his “legitimate power” is explicitly said to come second to the “effective power”, the latter being referred to as the former’s “superior *alter ego*” (*Order Out of Chaos*, 7).

64 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 178. In the words of Clifford (“Ubi sumus?”, 53), “Chamberlain has adopted Lapidus’ position on ‘institutional history’, arguing that an undifferentiated social formation can be better explained in terms of informal social networks than formal communal institutions”. This can be compared to Sievert’s call for us to focus on “interpersonal relations between individual actors” (“Family, friend or foe?”, 118), and Van Steenbergen’s recent observations (“‘Mamlukisation’ between social theory and social practice”, 7–9).

started to undervalue the individual agents' respective offices (that is, the institutional structure in which these operated), and their institutional trajectories (that is, the previous career tracks that brought them there). Instead, we have come to focus on agents' extra-institutional trajectories, by tracking the ongoing reconfiguration of their economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital, to the extent that the sources allow. Of these various types of capital, we have put social capital center stage, fueled in this by the nature of the sources and by our understanding of Mamluk society as a patrimonial one. The most appropriate analytical tool for mapping social capital was found in network analysis. Hence, to a large extent, "informal network analysis" remains, in the words of Winslow Clifford, "the basic thrust line of Mamluk history".⁶⁵

As a third consequence, I argue that this preponderance comes at its own cost. In his sensitive *Narrative Social Structure*, Recep Şentürk made the—deceptively obvious—observation that social life "is by definition diachronic, since it involves sequential events". Yet, he continues, social scientists "have paid little attention to the diachronic dimension of social structure (...) erroneously conceptualiz(ing) social structure as above and beyond time and constituted only by synchronic relations".⁶⁶ Alternatively, Şentürk calls for social structure to be embedded in diachronic time, although this is no easy task:

The major methodological problems in a study of structure through time (...) stem from the embryonic state of diachronic analytical tools in the social sciences. (...) The query for structures has remained synchronic in focus, thereby creating a gap between diachronic and synchronic analysis of structures. A cross-temporal structure is produced by the enduring patterns of diachronic social relations between actors who are differentiated from each other by virtue of time. Sociological research has concentrated for the most part on the structures produced by the enduring relations between social actors who are differentiated from each other, and thus stratified into different groups, by virtue of economic, social and cultural attributes. However, structural analysis of social relations cannot reach its full potential without developing methods to explore cross-temporal structures. Any analysis that ignores the passage of time and

65 Clifford, "Ubi sumus?", 53. Almost 20 years later, Rapoport observed that "the traditional paradigm of equilibrium achieved through the informal networks of the elite" still looms large ("New Directions in the Social History of the Mamluk Era", 145).

66 Şentürk, *Narrative Social Structure*, 124. For a penetrating presentation of social scientists' difficulty in infusing "structure" with "temporality", and, vice versa, of historians' difficulty in infusing "temporality" with "structure", see Sewell Jr., *Logics of History*, a must-read that every historian should grapple with.

the temporal constraints arising from it produces hypothetical and inauthentic images of social and discursive processes.⁶⁷

Linking Şentürk's observation with the above, where does that leave us? Clifford's observation that the study of "informal social network analysis" has remained the "basic thrust line of history", *mutatis mutandis*, implies that we have neglected diachronicity. Analyzing a network is first and foremost a question of reconstructing and interpreting a network *at a particular point of time*. Indeed, in his state-of-the-art on Mamluk network analyses, Sievert acknowledges this. Introducing a thoughtful presentation of various properties of networks (such as density, direction, and centrality, none of which imply a diachronic dimension by definition), Sievert writes that:

Even proof of existence (of verifiable connections) alone does not necessarily support far-reaching conclusions. Besides, evidence of a relationship usually represents a *snapshot in time*, while its content, strength and other characteristics are subject to change.⁶⁸

So it seems that while we know that struggles over the sultanate were fought not just over the late sultan's deathbed, we have still found it hard to accommodate the long and protracted nature of these struggles into informal network analyses. By consequence, we have tended to explain away the outcome of these struggles in terms other than of sequential events. As diachronicity was pushed aside by synchronicity, sequentiality saw itself outmaneuvered by what I refer to in this chapter—perhaps somewhat flippantly—as "historical contingency".⁶⁹ What I mean to convey here is the fact that we deem the

67 *Ibid.* Starting from the "often-invoked but rarely examined declaration that 'history matters'", Pierson (*Politics in Time*, 2) calls for us to place politics back in time, and to work with "moving pictures" rather than snapshots". For a good introduction to institutional path dependency, see Schreyögg & Sydow, "Understanding Institutional and Organizational Path Dependencies".

68 Sievert, "Family, Friend or Foe?", 86 (italics mine).

69 This "contingency" is not to be misunderstood as "vicissitudes of fates", which incidentally is the way in which Ibn Taghribirdi referred to the endless reshuffling of offices (*taqallubāt al-dahr*, *Nujūm*, 7: 236). A "contingent event" is not an event which occurs as arbitrarily as a roll of the dice. Rather, it is an event which occurs "subject to unseen effects" (compare, e.g., the definition as found in *Merriam-Webster*). Said otherwise, the very fact that events are considered first and foremost as being determined by informal and ad hoc features—features that are knowable only imperfectly and *ex post facto* to a large extent—this is what makes them "contingent". Compare to Clifford's observation regarding Chamberlain's work ("Ubi sumus?", 60): "(This) remains fundamentally indebted to Bourdieu's

outcome of struggles to be determined by the agents' informal and *ad hoc* features first and foremost, while the institutional career track that brought them there is mostly left invalidated.

In my view, as these consequences feed back into the initial assumptions, a circularity is set off and offices and career tracks have a hard time escaping from this. While, at the onset, institutions may be considered only less (but thus still somewhat) important, they are easily caught up in this circularity and tend to recede to the background ever more, indeed eventually to vanishing point.⁷⁰ This runaway logic thus leaves us with institutions that are little more than a wardrobe of *khil'as*, ever more fancifully embroidered yet ever less empowering. Along the same lines, career tracks are seen as those long lists of offices in the entries of biographical dictionaries, useful to us only when slicing up history in synchronic snapshots and when identifying the main players there and then.

Let me now return to the particular phrase that opened this chapter, Ibn Taghribirdī's *fi ghayr waqtihi*. As demonstrated in the previous section, it would seem that Jaqmaq's victory over Qurqumās makes sense as being *ex officio*, for he, not Qurqumās, was the *atābak*. Hence, we could read Ibn Taghribirdī's "wrong time" as referring a point in Qurqumās' career: as Qurqumās was not the *atābak*, his run for sultan must have been "institutionally premature". However, I have also maintained that—even in spite of Ayalon's statement and in the face of empirical evidence—we are reluctant to take the argument that far. Whence the reluctance? In light of the foregoing, I argue that this reluctance stems from our understanding of fourteenth-century socio-political culture, with its runaway logic of extra-institutionalism and contingency which spills over into our understanding of the fifteenth. Let me demonstrate this.

basic understanding of social structures as a product of radically contingent action by self-reflective individuals rather than an "institutionalized call to order".

Neither my critique nor my subsequent call for sequentiality implicates a teleological reading of history, as I espouse the "global contingency" as described by Sewell Jr (*Logics of History*, chapter 3, "Three Temporalities. Toward an Eventful Sociology" 81–123, here 102: "The eventful conception of temporality, then, assumes that social relations are characterized by path dependency, temporally heterogeneous causalities, and global contingency".)

70 In relation to the fourteenth century, a good case in point would be Van Steenberg's "The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State". Building on the work by Hodgson and Chamberlain, Van Steenberg rethinks the Mamluk Sultanate as a military patronage state, which "eschews the idea of the polity as a unitary state and an institution that existed autonomously of its ruling elite", instead seeing "the state or polity as no more than a fragile 'collection of powerful households kept in check by the most powerful among them'" (194).

Thus far, I have been talking about the “institutional”, which it will be recalled is a shorthand for “formal political institutional”. Conceptualizing this “institutional” along the dichotomous line of thought relating to the fourteenth century, it makes sense to think of it as the “formal” side of the coin, as opposed to the extra-institutional as its “informal” side. Subsequently one can think of the institutional as the “formalization of the informal”.⁷¹ Tenures, titles, particular types of sartorial privileges, seating or standing position in assemblies or parades, and *iqṭāʿ* classes are thus recast as *ex post facto* “formalizations” of *a priori* acquired informal power.⁷² Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to think of institutions as strong rather than weak, as empowering in their own right, instead of merely reflections of power. Likewise, careers are reduced to a progression of historical contingencies, constrained only informally, and not (also) as a formally constrained sequence of events. Hence, we surely cannot explain the fact that *atābak* Jaqmaq makes it to sultan (also) from a formal and sequential perspective as something *ex officio* (that is, on account of his last pre-sultanic office and of the institutional career track that brought him there). Rather, we can (only) do so from an informal and a contingent perspective as something *ex virtute* (that is, by the fact that, apparently, there and then, it was he who happened to have the strongest informal capital configuration, due to a larger network, more money to spend, a greater charisma, etc.). Jaqmaq’s victory must be seen as the latest of a progression of historical contingencies, not as the last of a formally constrained sequence of events. At best, his *atābakiyya* is still considered an “advantage” (as under-defined as this may be); at worst, it is not even considered, and *atābak* Jaqmaq is left to emerge victoriously “from a coterie of contenders”.⁷³

Concluding, let me stress that I see no particular reason to make a case for re-evaluating our understanding of the fourteenth century. Neither do I question the validity of network analysis as a useful tool to map a concept which mattered a great deal, namely social capital. I merely argue that we should not

71 For a similar use of a *ṣūra* vs. *maʿnā* (“appearance” vs. “reality”) dichotomy, this time informed by an Ottoman poem and applied to Ottoman-Mamluk diplomacy and to the history of diplomatic protocol in general, see D’hulster, “Fixed Rules to a Changing Game?” To return to the Romans once more, compare with Kunkel & Wittman, *Staatsordnung und Staatspraxis der römischen Republik*.

72 Compare to Chamberlain, for example, who thinks of the institutional as monetized honors *in reward of* political dexterity. Institutions are thus *ex post facto* translations of *a priori* established power relations.

73 It is quite telling, for example, that a monograph on the last two great Mamluk sultans, Qāyṭbāy and Qānṣūh, fails to record their last pre-sultanic office. All one learns is that they were amirs of 100 (Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 14, 20).

allow our understanding of the fifteenth century to be caught up in this runaway logic, as what happened to institutions and career tracks in the preceding paragraphs, and, indeed, as what happens to us, when we—in the face of empirical evidence—are reluctant to drop the inverted commas of the “rule”. However founded and cautious the basic assumptions regarding the fourteenth century may be, they trigger a circularity, and it becomes ever more difficult for analyses of fifteenth-century institutions and careers to escape from this, thereby making it ever more difficult for us to detect possible institutional or sequential changes.

4 Towards the *Atābakiyya* as a Rule in the Making? “Endowing messy past realities with new meanings”⁷⁴

In the first section, I have dealt with the question as to why Ayalon considered the *atābakiyya* as a key to the sultanate. Next I answered the question as to why we are reluctant to call this a rule proper, by exploring how we have come to think of the road to the citadel as a “historically contingent progression of events”, rather than as an “institutionally constrained sequence of events”. We are therefore now in a much better position to appreciate the institutional reading of the first section, and to understand exactly what such a reading offers. It infuses our understanding of fifteenth-century Mamluk socio-political culture with an explicit institutional and sequential dimension, thus allowing institutions and careers to break free from the circularity argued above. As such, it enables us to re-think these as (at least potentially) strong and (at least partially) institutionally constrained. It also lets us yield to Ayalon’s statement and to the empirical evidence that informed this, and thus—at last!—to drop the inverted commas of the “rule”. Hence, in this section, I start by discussing in more detail what it takes for offices to be “strong” and for “careers” to be institutionally constrained. Next, I ponder the consequences of that understanding for the wider framework of institutionalization and state (trans)formation in the Sultanate of Cairo and beyond.

As one of the few examples of genuine social network studies of cross-temporal structures, Şentürk, quoted above, refers to Harrison White’s 1970 monograph, *Chains of Opportunity, System Models of Mobility in Organizations*. In his work, to which the present chapter owes more than its title, White analyzed the structure of opportunity in large organizations as “chains of upward moves sequentially ordered in time”. In its own idiosyncratic way, the

74 Paraphrasing Algazi, “Comparing Medieval Institutions”, 12.

institutional reading offered here does precisely that. By infusing the sequential approach, much undervalued in social network studies, this reading allows us to rethink the “road to the citadel” and Mamluk careers in more novel terms as “chains of upward moves”. *Atābak* Īnāl becoming sultan is now no longer the historically contingent outcome of a power struggle, but rather the last move in a long social sequential trajectory. A sequential perspective reveals that the battle over the sultanate following Jaqmaq’s death in 857 did not start over Jaqmaq’s deathbed but was concluded over it! In other words, it points to the fact that Īnāl was already well on his way, indeed, well-nigh unstoppable, in reaching the citadel, already ten years before, when sultan Jaqmaq appointed him *atābak al-‘asākir*.

Obviously, “re-cognizing” Mamluk careers as upward moves sequentially ordered in time rather than as historically contingent events is one thing. Rethinking these moves as actually institutionally *constrained* is yet another. At this point, institutions may still be thought of as “weak”, that is as little more than rather faltering reflections of the ups and downs of individuals’ informal capital. What we have established thus far is that Īnāl’s *atābakiyya* and subsequent sultanate are part of a long chain of events, not that his *atābakiyya* was a form of capital in its own right, which, in tandem with other types of capital, propelled him towards the sultanate. While the old saying that “it is the man who makes the office honourable” may still hold true, in order to retain “institutional constraints” as a meaningful analytical tool we need offices that, in their turn, “dignify the man”. For this approach to work, we need offices that are more than just names, or ever more fanciful *khil’as*, larger *iqṭā’s* and better seats at the sultan’s *majlis*, which all, in the end, are reducible to *ex post facto* reflections of social mobility. In order to retain these constraints we need “strong” offices: offices that do not just “reflect social mobility, but determine its velocities as well”.⁷⁵ In short, what we are looking for are offices that come with their own, new sort of capital, still inter-convertible with other, informal

75 Hudson & Rodríguez, “Preface”, xi. In other words, offices that not just “communicate” (or “say”, “reproduce”, “express”, etc.) an individual’s existing informal capital configuration, but “perform” it (or “do”, “produce”, “empower”, etc.). Compare to Bodenhorn & vom Bruck’s discussion of the anthropology of names and naming (“Entangled Histories”, 4–5); and Searle, who argued that “the essential role of human institutions and the purpose of having institutions is not to constrain people as such, but, rather, to create new sorts of power relations. Human institutions are, above all, enabling, because they create power, but it is a special kind of power. It is the power that is marked by such terms as: rights, duties, obligations, authorizations, permissions, empowerments, requirements, and certifications” (“What is an Institution?” *Journal of Institutional Economics* (2005): 1–22, here p. 10, quoted in Humfress, “Institutionalisation between Theory and Practice”, 27).

types of capital, yet not reducible to these. For lack of a better term, I suggest we call this new type of capital “institutional capital”.⁷⁶

It is important to realize that in order to do so, this actually requires us to part with the metaphor of Mamluk socio-political culture as a two-sided coin. Rather than a one-dimensional dichotomous pair, socio-political culture is recast here as a multi-dimensional configuration of social, cultural, symbolic, economic and institutional capital, all of which are interrelated and interconvertible, yet not reducible to one another. This novel conceptualization provides us with a plausible way to come to terms with a wide array of episodes, both moments that are “institutionally uncomplicated” (such as Jaqmaq’s successful transition from *atābak* to sultan) as well as “institutionally complicated” incidents (such as *atābak* Timurbughā’s failed sultanate, non-*atābak* Barsbāy’s successful sultanate, or the *atābakiyya* of sultan Īnāl’s son). The novel conceptualization does not claim that Jaqmaq made it sultan only because of his *atābakiyya*. All that it maintains is that, in sum total, Jaqmaq was the strongest man, and that the *atābakiyya* may have been what gave him the edge over his other competitors. For all we know, Qurqumās may have been stronger than Jaqmaq economically, socially, culturally or symbolically. Yet, in total, the balance tipped in favor of Jaqmaq, and it might have been his institutional capital that made the difference. As for Barsbāy, as he had not been sultan he might be thought of as institutionally weak. Yet, he made it to sultan after all, because the sum total of his capital outweighed that of his competitors. For all we know, he may have been a better networker or a more charismatic individual than the *atābak*. How can we explain Timurbughā’s smooth move from *atābak* to sultan, followed by his quick downfall at the hands of Qāyrbāy? Initially, what gave Timurbughā the edge over all other competitors and what gained him the sultanate might have been his institutional capital, that is the simple fact that he was the previous sultan’s *atābak*. His untimely downfall at the hands of Qāyrbāy could then be explained by the fact that, Timurbughā was fairly weak in terms of other types of capital, or at least weaker than Qāyrbāy. By being appointed by Timurbughā as his *atābak*, Qāyrbāy’s institutional capital boosted, now tipping the total balance in his favor. Finally, we

76 Compare to Bourdieu’s concept of “capital étatique”, referring to the elaboration of bureaucratic institutions and the channeling of resources and access to power through these institutions, which become divorced from their original dependence on the person of the ruler. Bourdieu coined the term, yet left it to others to turn this into an applicable analytical tool. For one such exercise, hardly relevant in the given context, see, e.g., Casey, “Defining Political Capital”.

can now also re-evaluate Īnāl's appointment of his son as *atābak*. Whatever the father-sultan hoped to achieve, clearly this was not something that he thought he could achieve in a different way. Indeed, he must have thought of the *atābakīyya* as a strong office: an office that not only gave its holder a financial (and thus a social, cultural...) boost, but that added something irreducible to other types of capital.

This chapter does not make the sweeping claim that institutions "ruled". Instead, it maintains more modestly, that institutions started to "matter" in the fifteenth century in novel ways. Even so, if we come from the mindset that is informed first and foremost by synchronically oriented informal network analyses, thinking about Mamluk offices in terms of "institutional capital" may require no less than a "leap of faith". Obviously, this is no great surprise. As Hugh Hecló rightfully observed, "to think institutionally is to stretch your horizon backwards and forwards so that the shadows of both past and future lengthen into the present".⁷⁷ In other words, this leap may be less daunting when we realize that more than anything else, we are really talking about *processes* of *institutionalization*. We should be looking not for institutions per se but for "fragile, emerging and wannabe-institutions",⁷⁸ not for codified rules but for practices of the "actual making of institutions (and of the) construction of their meaning".⁷⁹ As Gadi Algazi puts it:

(Institutional processes) occur only partly 'in real time'; a significant part of the process happens *ex post facto*, as messy past realities are endowed with new meanings, as improvised practices are formalized and regularized after the fact in ways that may not have been possible within their actual, contingent contexts.⁸⁰

When looking for an apt term to capture this process of institutionalization, it is worth considering a recent article, written together with Jo Van Steenberg and Patrick Wing, which posited a remarkably similar hypothesis, albeit along very different lines. In that article, we return to the concept of "Mamlukization", as it was coined by Ulrich Haarmann to refer to the "long process of the erosion of the non-Mamluk elites' power to the benefit of the sultan and the royal *mamlūks*

77 Hecló, *On thinking institutionally* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 109, quoted in Humfress "Institutionalisation between Theory and Practice", 29.

78 Algazi, "Comparing Medieval Institutions", 15.

79 *Ibid.*, 14.

80 *Ibid.*, 12.

who underpinned the system”.⁸¹ While this process of “Mamlukization” appears most saliently in the position of the sultan, we have hypothesized that it is part of a broader development of a “cultural (re)production of a ‘truly’ Mamluk state”, where identities, memories and repertoires of *mamlūk*-ness acquired ‘statist’ meaning and value, referring now to powerful socio-political tools for distinction and entitlement, rather than to household bonding and military organization.⁸² As part of this development, loyalties increasingly came “to reside with the institutional order itself, rather than with a particular sultan’s household”.⁸³ While Mamluks were still very much *mamlūk*—somebody’s *mamlūk*, somebody’s *khushdāsh*, somebody’s *ustādh*, loyal to and bound by personal networks—at the same time, they were turning “Mamluk” as well, that is, committed to a higher institutional order of Mamluk-ness.⁸⁴ Or in other words—double-entendre intended!—*mamlūk* was being capitalized as Mamluk.

Rephrasing these re-centered “loyalties” along the lines set out in this chapter, one could state that Mamluk careers gradually escaped from the logic of the sultan’s household and moved towards a new logic of the “Mamluk house of state”.⁸⁵ No longer (only) determined by historically contingent patronage, Mamluk careers were in the process of turning into *cursus honorum*, a sequence of (partially) institutionally constrained events. What was Īnāl doing through the “mamlūkizing” appointment of his son as *atābak*? He was bending

81 Haarmann, “The Mamluk System of Rule”, 22, quoted in Van Steenberghe, Wing & D’Hulster, “The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate? Part I” and “Part II”, here “Part II”, 565.

82 *Ibid.*

83 *Ibid.*

84 Apart from Bourdieu, compare this to Weber’s concept of “sanctification of acquired rights” (“Social strata, privileged through existing political, social, and economic orders.... wish to see their positions transformed from purely factual power relations into a cosmos of acquired rights, and to know that they are thus sanctified” (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*) quoted in Wacquant, “On the Tracks of Symbolic Power”, 1), and to Schreyögg & Sydow’s take on institutionalisation as a transformative and self-reinforcing process (“the evolution and stabilization of social hierarchies have been explained by self-reinforcing processes (...). Status hierarchies, for instance, once established, unfold self-reinforcing dynamics because the status of individuals determines how other individuals perceive and evaluate their behavior”; “the process starts with agency, an intended individual or collective action, which is enabled or constrained by structures and triggers reactions that transform the process into a dynamic reaction system beyond individual intentions”) (“Understanding Institutional and Organizational Path Dependencies”, 4, 8).

85 Paraphrasing Bourdieu’s “From the King’s House to the Reason of State”. Compare to Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State” (especially “From Honor to *Cursus Honorum*”, 10–12).

the extra-personal logic to his advantage, in order to pursue his own household logic. What about those appointments and promotions that are referred to in the sources as *dufʿatan wāḥidatan*, “in one jump”?⁸⁶ For example, when an amir of 100 is said to be appointed as *ḥājib ḥujjāb* “in one jump”, how else can we understand this than by the fact that, apparently, there was an extra-personal, Mamluk logic, against which a personal, *mamlūk* logic could be weighed...

5 On the Road Again...

By way of conclusion, let me return one last time to Ibn Taghrībirdī’s *ghayr waqṭihi*, “the wrong time”. Are we now in a position to decide what “time” the author was referring to? Did he—or should we—think of Qurqumās as a valid candidate for the sultanate as Jaqmaq was, yet a strategist much worse? Or did he rather think of Qurqumās as institutionally premature for the sultanate, as he was not an *atābak*? Concluding the previous section, I have referred to the expression *dufʿatan wāḥidatan*, and I have highlighted its important implication that the “road to the citadel” was (becoming) institutionally constrained. In this light, we might see Qurqumās as being institutionally unfit for the sultanate. Yet, the crux of the matter here might be the fact that the expression *dufʿatan wāḥidatan* is a double-edged sword. For the phrase also implies something else: that these institutional constraints could still be overruled personally. Perhaps no longer subject to personal whims alone, the road to the citadel was still very much open to personal interventions. It is in this second light that we might still think of Qurqumās’ failed run as a historical contingency. Although it is hard to substantiate, it is tempting to read the tension expressed by the double-edged sword of *dufʿatan wāḥidatan* in one of Ibn Taghrībirdī’s statements. Following the enumeration of the main office-holders of the year 866/1461–1462, the annalist’s conventional opening of a new year, the author concludes: “We have mentioned them (...) according to their station and their seat at the sultan’s *majlis* (*bi-ḥisb manāzilihim wa-julūsihim bi-majlis al-sultān*)”.⁸⁷ I cannot tell what we should make of the pair of *manzil* and *julūs*, but this does suggest that there is more than just one velocity to Mamluk careers, one institutional (*cursus honorum*) and one extra-institutional (social mobility).

86 See the excursus for more details.

87 Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādith*, 411.

To reiterate, this chapter does not posit that institutions “ruled”, let alone that these “overruled” extra-institutional aspects. Rather, it maintains that institutional constraints “started to matter”. As a working hypothesis, the chapter posits a *process* of “Mamlukization”, which above all involves institutional constraints *in the making*. Elaborating on the metaphor of the “Mamluk house of state”, the chapter sees this as an old house under reconstruction more than anything else. The process in question is a gradual, on-going and imperfect refurbishing, “Mamluk style” this time, of the sultan’s household. It is eclectic and erratic, with rooms being added, restyled or neglected. One room—probably in the back—is taken up by the Abbasid caliph. In another room, we find a fairly well kept Barqūqid vestiary, while next to it there is a dusty Qalāwūnid larder.⁸⁸ On a more moderate scale, this chapter hopes to have revealed and problematized some of the assumptions that continue to inform Mamluk socio-political studies, and to have highlighted the potential inherent in explicitly infusing these with an institutional and diachronic dimension, alongside (and thus not at the expense of) the extra-institutional and networks. Wang and Polillo perhaps give the best description of what this future research agenda might look like:

The relationship between informal and formal power in organizations is an unceasingly fascinating research topic. Unfortunately, the current artificial separation between network analysis and organization studies as two subfields has slowed the study of the cross-fertilization of power resided in networks and organization. (...) The question then becomes how positional power that derives from structural positions in exchange networks differs from the one that is embedded in organization hierarchies.⁸⁹

In a way, this chapter is as much about Mamluks as it is about Mamlukologists, or—putting this more modestly—as much about Qurqumās and Jaqmaq as it is about the present author. For the Mamluks, the road to the citadel must have been a long and winding one, both empowering and constrained ever more as they advanced. So too is this road for us today, as we are trying to endow Mamluk “messy past realities with new meanings”. And so we are on the road again....

88 This metaphor draws its inspiration from Van Steenberghe, “Mamlukisation’ between social theory and social practice”, *passim*.

89 Wang & Polillo, “Power in Organizational Society: Macro, Meso and Micro”, 56.

AN EXCURSUS ON THE *ATĀBAKIYYA*: OPPORTUNITIES SEIZED,
ENHANCED, MISSED

While the “road to the *atābakiyya*” itself, with its various bifurcations and dead ends, falls outside the scope of this chapter, three observations merit a brief discussion. Undoubtedly, more—but probably not that much more⁹⁰—could be said about the fifteenth-century *atābakiyya* itself, but that will have to be saved for another occasion.

First, how did one become *atābak*? In brief, while the *atābakiyya* appears to have put one in the institutional “pole position” when running for sultan, the way to gain the *atābakiyya* itself seems to have been somewhat more “open institutionally”. Of all 28 *atābaks* attested for our period, 12 moved there from the office of *amīr silāḥ*, 5 from that of *amīr majlis* and 2 from that of *amīr ākhūr kabīr*. An institutional reading thus suggests that these three offices were the most common starting position when running for *atābak*, and indeed this new “rule” is confirmed by a comment in the chronicles. There were only two *dawādārs* who made it to the office of *atābak dufʿatan wāḥidatan*, “in one jump”: Barsbāy, whose career, as said before, truly skyrocketed from an institutional perspective; and Īnāl. When the latter moved from *dawādār* to *atābak* “in one jump”, thus skipping the step of *amīr silāḥ*, *amīr majlis* or *amīr ākhūr kabīr*, Ibn Taghribirdī stated:

Because of the appointment of (*dawādār*) Īnāl to the *atābakiyya*, there was a lot of backbiting (*kalām kathīr fī-l-bāʿin*), as the sultan had advanced him to the detriment of (*qaddamahu ʿalā*) the *amīr silāḥ* Timrāz al-Qurmishī, the *amīr majlis* Jarbāsh al-Karīmī and the *amīr ākhūr* Qarāqujā, all of them *Zāhiriya Barqūqiya*, even though one was (normally) transferred to the office of *atābak* from (one of) their offices, and not from the office of *dawādār* (*wa-waḥḥāʿifuhum ayḍan taqṭaḍī l-naql ilā al-atābakiyya bi-khilāf al-dawādāriyya*).⁹¹

90 It comes as little surprise that the major drawback to probing more closely into the *atābakiyya* is the sultan-centeredness of the chronicles. Compare, e.g., in UGent’s MP3 database the number of sultan-related interactions recorded (4,307 out of a total of 11,471) with that of *atābak*-related interactions (a meager 325!). The *nāʾib* of Damascus fares slightly better than the *atābak* (396 interactions), the *dawādār* slightly worse (315 interactions).

91 Ibn Taghribirdī, *Ḥawādith*, 86–87. See also Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 424: “He was the *dawādār* until al-Zāhir (Jaḡmaq) transferred him to the position of *atābak al-ʿasākir* in the Egyptian domains in one jump (*dufʿatan wāḥidatan*).” Apart from this, quite some other career moves were referred to as surprisingly *dufʿatan wāḥidatan*, including the

This quotation proves that, even below the level of the *atābakiyya*, there were institutional constraints on Mamluk career trajectories. Clearly, these trajectories were not as fully contingent as commonly assumed, but were institutionally constrained in some way, and to some extent. The cumbersome exercise of rewriting a large number of Mamluk careers into office sequences, from *julbān* upwards, might well yield more such constraints. This exercise, however, will not be taken up here. As said before, this chapter focuses on the road to the citadel's higher end only.

As a second, non-institutional excursus, it is interesting to note that many of the *atābaks* were related to sultans' households through marriage:⁹² Altunbughā al-Qurmushī, Jānibak al-Šūfī, Baybughā al-Muẓaffarī, Qujaq, Īnāl al-Jakamī, Qurqumās al-Sha'bānī, Aqbughā al-Timrāzī, Yashbak al-Sūdūnī, and Jarbāsh Kurd all displayed such a marital tie, being married either to a (late) sultan's daughter, *umm walad* or widow.⁹³ This is an interesting observation, for it allows us to tentatively answer a question we have left open elsewhere. In a 2013 article on the sultans' marriages, Van Steenbergen and myself demonstrated that "new" sultans were often "married into" the household of late sultans. Recognizing this as a deliberate marriage policy, we have argued that new sultans forged these marital ties to a late sultan first and foremost in order to boost their symbolic capital. If not related to a previous sultan by blood, then they would at least be linked by marital ties; if you could not be the late sultan's son, then at least be his in-law!⁹⁴ As the exact dates of these marriages are mostly left unrecorded, we were unable to establish whether such marital ties were forged prior to each new sultan's accession (and hence could be considered preparatory maneuvers), or forged following their accession (and hence should be considered consolidating ones). Given the fact that also those *atābaks* who didn't make it to sultan were often married into a sultan's family, we might infer that also those who did make it to sultan had forged such

move from *amīr* 5 to *amīr* 100, from *atābak* of ʿArabulus to *nā'ib* of Šafad, from *nā'ib* of ʿHimš to *nā'ib* of Šafad, from *amīr* 100 to *ḥājib ḥujjāb*.

92 This same observation holds for the two *nizām al-mulks* who made it to sultan: ʿTaṭar, who was married to Sa'ādāt, a wife of sultan Shaykh and the mother of the latter's sultan-son, Aḥmad; and Barsbāy, who was married to Fāṭima, a daughter of sultan ʿTaṭar and a sister of the latter's sultan-son Muḥammad.

93 Turning *mamlūks* into "royalty", these marriages could be called "dynasticizing" or "royalizing" and reflect a move opposite to Īnāl's "mamlūkizing" appointment of his non-*mamlūk* son as *atābak*.

94 D'hulster & Van Steenbergen, "Family Matters". See especially p. 76, where we already called for a consideration of the marital ties of those *atābaks* who didn't make it to sultan.

marital ties prior to accession. In other words, marriages into sultans' households were preparatory rather than consolidating maneuvers.⁹⁵

Finally, given the importance of the *atābakiyya*, it is interesting to see what happened to those 20 (out of 28) *atābaks* who did not make it to sultan. Surely, they were unlikely to have given up such a prized office? Of those who did not make it, 7 died in function or were discharged due to high age or illness, 4 were appointed as *nā'ib* of Damascus (once of Aleppo), and the remaining ones rebelled against the sultan and were consequently discharged. So it seems that the careers of *atābaks* hint at the office's importance: most commonly, *atābaks* either succeed the late sultan or, in case the sultan outlives them, die in office; or, unwilling to bide their time, revolt against the sultan and are subsequently removed.⁹⁶

95 It should be pointed out that there is nothing new in the fact itself that *atābaks*, as guardians of the sultans' sons, sometimes married the widows of their late master and thus the mothers of their pupils. Starting out as "guardians" of sultans' sons (see above for the historical roots of the *atābakiyya*), these *atābaks* thus became "stepfathers" to these sons as well (this translation is somewhat flippant, yet more in line with the word's etymology). Think for example of the marriage of Tughtakīn of Damascus, *atābak* of Tutush II and Baqtash, sons of the Seljuq ruler Duqaq, to the latter's widow (Cahen, "Atabak", 731).

96 For more details, see the right column in the table at the end.

TABLE 3.1 Cairo Sultans and their atābaks

Period of rule	Sultan (age)	Son	<i>Nizām al-mulk</i>
-1/8/815	al-Musta'īn	/	Shaykh ^a
1/8/815-9/1/824	Shaykh	Aḥmad	/
9/1/824-29/8/824	Aḥmad b. Shaykh (2)	/	Ṭaṭar ⁱ
29/8/824-2/12/824	Ṭaṭar	Muḥammad	/
2/12/824-8/4/825	Muḥammad b. Ṭaṭar (10)	/	Jānibak ^m Barsbāy ^o
8/4/825-13/12/841	Barsbāy	Yūsuf	/
13/12/841-19/3/842	Yūsuf b. Barsbāy (14)	/	Jaqmaq ^y
19/3/842-21/1/857	Jaqmaq	ʿUthmān	/
21/1/857-7/3/857	ʿUthmān b. Jaq. (>10)	/	/(?)

Tenure	<i>Atābak</i>	Comments
-1/8/815	Shaykh ^b	→ Sultan
8/8/815–2/9/817	Yilbughā ^c	Dies
8/9/817–7/5/818	Alṭunbughā ‘Uthmānī ^d	→ <i>Nā’ib</i> Damascus
7/5/818–6/818	Qānibāy ^e	Conflict with Shaykh
27/6/818–821	Alṭunbughā Qurmushī ^f	Replaced by sultan’s son
821–15/6/823	Ibrāhīm b. Shaykh ^g	Dies
15/6/823–9/1/824	Alṭunbughā Qurmushī ^h	→ <i>Atābak</i>
9/1/824–9/3/824	Alṭunbughā Qurmushī ^j	Conflict with Ṭaṭar
9/3/824–16/5/824	Tanibak Miyyiq ^k	→ <i>Nā’ib</i> Damascus
16/5/824–29/8/824	Jānibak ^l	→ <i>Atābak</i>
29/8/824–2/12/824	Jānibak	→ <i>Atābak</i> + <i>nizām al-mulk</i>
2/12/824–10/12/824	Jānibak ^m	Conflict with Barsbāy
16/12/824–10/2/825	Ṭarabāy ^p	Replaced by Barsbāy?
10/2/824–6/4/825	Vacant ^q	
9/4/825–4/11/827	Baybughā ^r	Conflict with Barsbāy
4/11/827–12/9/829	Qujaq ^s	Dies
12/9/829–5/6/831	Yashbak Sāqī ^t	Dies
5/6/831–22/7/835	Jārquṭlū ^v	→ <i>Nā’ib</i> Damascus
22/7/835–19/3/837	Sūdūn ^u	Sick
19/3/837–29/7/837	Vacant	
29/7/837–8/3/839	Īnāl al-Jakamī ^w	→ <i>Nā’ib</i> Aleppo
8/3/839–13/12/841	Jaqmaq ^x	→ <i>Atābak</i>
13/12/841–19/3/842	Jaqmaq ^z	→ Sultan
20/3/842–7/4/842	Qurqumās ^{aa}	Conflict with Jaqmaq
7/4/842–23/9/842	Āqbughā ^{ab}	→ <i>Nā’ib</i> Damascus
23/9/842–10/10/842	Vacant	
10/10/842–847	Yashbak Sūdūnī ^{ac}	Dies
3/8/847–21/1/857	Īnāl ^{ad}	→ <i>Atābak</i> (or ‘Uthmān? ^{ae})
21/1/857–7/3/857	Īnāl ^{af}	→ Sultan

TABLE 3.1 Cairo Sultans and their atābaks (*cont.*)

Period of rule	Sultan (age)	Son	<i>Nizām al-mulk</i>
7/3/857–14/5/865	Īnāl	Aḥmad b. Īnāl	/
14/5/865–19/9/865	Aḥmad b. Īnāl (30)	/	/
19/9/865–10/3/872	Khushqadam	/	/
10/3/872–7/5/872	Yilbāy	/	/
7/5/872–5/7/872	Timurbughā	/	/
5/7/872–	Qāytbāy		

a Al-'Aynī, *Iqd*, 1: 144.

b Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 323–324.

c Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 245–246; al-'Aynī, *Iqd*, 1: 215–216.

d Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 284; al-'Aynī, *Iqd*, 1: 229.

e Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 319, 325.

f *Ibid.*, 325, 477, 517.

g *Ibid.*; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 476.

h *Ibid.*, 546–547. The sources are somewhat blurred, but it appears that sultan Shaykh had first replaced *atābak* Aḥmad b. Īnāl with his son, Ibrāhīm (during which time Aḥmad b. Īnāl held the title of *amīr kabīr*, a title often going hand in hand with that of *atābak*), and then reappointed him, following Ibrāhīm's premature death.

i Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 565, 582. See the discussion in Section 2.

j. *Ibid.*; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 546–547.

k Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 572–573, 578–579.

l *Ibid.*, 4: 578–579.

m Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 531–532.

n Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī' al-Zuhūr*, 2: 76–77.

o Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 593; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī' al-Zuhūr*, 2: 79–80. See the discussion in Section 2.

p Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 6: 531–532; al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 2: 526.

q Al-'Aynī, *Iqd*, 2: 181.

r *Ibid.*, 181; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 3: 489–492.

s Al-'Aynī, *Iqd*, 2: 229, 300.

t *Ibid.*, 300; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 773.

Tenure	<i>Atābak</i>	Comments
9/3/857–11/3/857 11/3/857–24/11/862 27/11/862–15/5/865	Aḥmad b. Īnāl ^{ag} Tanibak Zāhirī ^{ah} Aḥmad b. Īnāl ^{ai}	Contested office Dies → Sultan (contested office)
15/5/865–19/9/865	Khushqadam ^{aj}	→ Sultan
19/9/865–18/9/869 20/9/869–11/2/871 18/2/871–10/3/872	Jarbāsh ^{ak} Qānim ^{al} Yilbāy ^{am}	Banished Dies → Sultan
10/3/872–7/5/872	Timurbughā ^{an}	→ Sultan
7/5/872–5/7/872	Qāyrbāy ^{ao}	→ Sultan

v *Ibid.*, 773, 868.

u *Ibid.*, 868, 906.

w Al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 3: 282–283; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 958.

x *Ibid.*, 958.

y Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 4: 279.

z *Ibid.*, *Manhal*, 9: 58–59.

aa Al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, 2: 516; al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-Nufūs*, 4: 37.

ab Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 1096, 1112.

ac *Ibid.*, 1122–1123; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 422–424.

ad *Ibid.*, 422–424.

ae See the discussion in Section 2.

af *Ibid.*, 420.

ag *Ibid.*, 425–426; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Ḥawādīth*, 318. See the discussion in Section 2.

ah Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm*, 7: 425–426, 511.

ai *Ibid.*, 511, 763. See the discussion in Section 2.

aj *Ibid.*, 647–648, 685.

ak *Ibid.*, 685–687, 733–734.

al *Ibid.*, 733, 814–815.

am *Ibid.*, 742–743, 821.

an *Ibid.*, 823, 843.

ao *Ibid.*, 843, 866.

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The Syro-Egyptian Sultanate in Transformation, 1496–1498. Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy and the reformation of *mamlūk* institutions and symbols of state power

Albrecht Fuess

1 Introduction

When the Abbasid shadow Caliph of Cairo al-Mutawakkil died in Cairo at the end of September 1497 [end of Muḥarram of 903] a dispute arose between al-Mutawakkil's son Ya'qūb and his nephew Khalīl about who should become the new caliph. According to our main source for the period, the chronicler Ibn Iyās, Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy summoned the two pretenders to the citadel. He listened to the different arguments of both men, until Khalīl argued that his cousin Ya'qūb lacked experience and proper judgment for the office of the caliphate. At this point in the discussion the young sultan addressed the audience and shouted in the direction of Khalīl: "Was his father a Caliph?" On receiving a negative answer he said: "No one knows the caliphate from his own experience except the son of a caliph". For this reason, Ibn Iyās explained, Ya'qūb was chosen as the successor of his father.¹

What is quite remarkable about this story is that it represents the only time in Ibn Iyās' 70-page account of the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy that we actually hear the sultan himself talk. As this chapter will argue, this unusual episode can in fact be read as no less than the governmental program of sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad faced similar accusations from *mamlūk* amirs towards his sultanate as Ya'qūb had from Khalīl. The leading officers of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's father al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy (r. 1468–1496) argued that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad totally lacked the experience they had acquired in the long years of service to the late sultan. In Ibn Iyās' story of the succession of al-Mutawakkil in 1497, this reasoning was countered by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy when he publicly claimed that no one is closer to a father than his own son.

¹ Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī' al-zuhūr*, vol. 3, 379–380; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, Tome II, pp. 419–420.

In order to see where the current chapter stands within the framework of this volume we first need a short contextualization. At the end of the fifteenth century, the Sultanate's state had reached a high degree of centralization and adopted a ruling system, which according to Van Steenberg, Wing and D'hulster was formed by a steady process of "Mamlukization". As the argument goes, the Mamluk political order had a two-sided function: first "as a non-dynastic idea of hegemonic political order" and second "as a coercive bureaucratic apparatus that was produced by, and that was set up to reproduce that order".² There have been other studies in the field such as the work by Apellániz regarding the centralization of trade by sultanic agencies with novel trade procedures, or Julien Loiseau's study of the rise of civil servant families. These scholars underline the fact that the fifteenth century Sultanate had developed a distinct state model which contributed to its stability.³ At my present stage of reasoning, and with the information currently available, I would tentatively term this dualism and intertwining of the civil and military elite the "deep Mamluk state". From my point of view the "deep Mamluk state" actually meant that institutions and networks did function independently of individual sultans or civil servants while on the other hand refined selection processes in the military and administrative sector ensured the availability of a large reservoir of highly qualified personnel. In the course of the fifteenth century this meant that sons of old sultans were seen as unfit to rule as they lacked the quality of experienced leadership. Their function was reduced to that of a placeholder after the death of the old sultan until the high leading amirs of the previous sultan would choose the real successor from among their ranks. When sultan al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy died in 1496 after almost thirty years of rule, however, the situation was somehow different from prior cases of sultanic successions in the fifteenth century. In the 1490s the Sultanate faced challenges from several external military and ideological threats. On the one hand, the Sultanate's world had seen tremendous changes after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. This historic event made the Sultanate's leadership vigilant about the Ottomans' further moves. In 1492 Granada was taken by the forces of the Reconquista. Whereas sultan Qāyṭbāy and his amirs reacted only by diplomatic means, the Ottomans fought the Christians effectively. The Ottoman-Mamluk war from 1485 and 1491 ended the Sultanate's influence over larger parts of Eastern Anatolia, and made clear that the Sultanate's *mamlūk* military structure had to be reformed if they wanted to withstand the Ottoman military

2 Van Steenberg, Wing & D'hulster, "Mamlukization of the Mamluk Sultanate?-11", p. 561.

3 Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance en méditerranée pré-moderne* and Loiseau, *Reconstruire la maison du sultan*, vol. 1, pp. 179–214.

machine for much longer.⁴ On the other hand, the Sultanate's *mamlūk* leadership must have been aware of the European naval expansions in the Atlantic Ocean, which in 1498 would even bring the Portuguese in the Red Sea, literally turning the Sultanate's worldview upside down.

The period therefore posed tremendous challenges, and Sultan Qāyṭbāy had already responded by initiating various reforms.⁵ However, his military reforms in particular worked to the detriment of the existing elite while his financial reforms, aiming to bring in more cash, were also not much liked. Ibn Iyās dates the first use of rifles in 1490, during the Ottoman-Mamluk conflict. Qāyṭbāy sent *awlād an-nās* and other soldiers to the front equipped with guns, and after having shown their newly acquired expertise in a public display to the sultan, they were sent off to the North.⁶ In the aftermath of the war, then, we witness increasing moves by the Sultanate's agents in order to gain more knowledge about the usage of canons and rifles and to make contact with foreign experts. At the same time, this all meant that traditional military training and administrative proceedings had to be adjusted and sometimes fought through against the old elite, the "deep Mamluk state". The old sultan had had the prestige to carry on with these reforms and to adjust the system accordingly. When he died in 1496, however, these reforms had only begun to be initiated, the Sultanate was still under existential external threats, and the need for accommodation and adaptation remained urgent.

At this moment of insecurity, as I will argue, Qāyṭbāy's young son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad tried to put himself at the helm of these reforms and to build a power base among the new military forces and the younger *mamlūk* leadership in order to get rid of his veteran rivals. That he succeeded, at least to a certain extent, is for me an indication of the extent of the crisis in the Sultanate's state in 1496. As I will argue more specifically below, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy actually addressed this crisis also by bolstering his claims ideologically. The assumption of this chapter will be that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad managed this especially by making all kinds of implicit references to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (r. 1293–4/1299–1309 /1310–41), a famous sultan of the fourteenth century who himself had been a son of a *mamlūk* sultan and at the same time one of the most important rulers in the history of the Sultanate. By holding on to power and ruling successfully for over four decades, this al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, son of the *mamlūk* ruler al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (r. 1279–1290) had come to represent a

4 Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East*.

5 Petry, "The military institution and innovation in the late Mamlūk period".

6 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr*, vol. 3, p. 269.



FIGURE 4.1 Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy (1496–1498)
VON HARFF, *DIE PILGERFAHRT DES RITTERS ARNOLD VON HARFF*, P. 90

model for later sons of *mamlūk* rulers who argued in favor of the dynastic principle instead of meritocratic succession.

The present contribution will try to show how al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy tried to copy his predecessor sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn in order to overcome the popular slogan “*al-mulk ‘aqīm*” (regency is infertile). This slogan had initially been used as propaganda against Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn at the beginning of the fourteenth century, but he had prevailed despite hostile agitations against him. However, under his successors, the dynastic principle weakened considerably as a means of making successful claims to the sultanate. Since the beginning of the fifteenth century “*al-mulk ‘aqīm*” had then developed into the factual norm regarding the Sultanate’s succession procedure.⁷ From then on, no son managed to stay on as a new sultan for longer periods after the death of his father, or even tried to do so. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy proved in many respects to be the odd one out.

2 A Biography of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy

Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy was born in November 1482 [Shawwāl of 887].⁸ His father sultan al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy had reigned in the Sultanate from

7 Haarmann, “Der arabische Osten im späten Mittelalter, 1250–1517”, p. 229.

8 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 3, 197; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 217.

1468 to 1496. Contemporary sources described Qāyṭbāy's reign as stable and prosperous and the public image one encounters in historiography is highly positive compared to the one of his son and later successors. The mother of Qāyṭbāy's son and successor was a Circassian slave concubine of Qāyṭbāy named Aṣḥalbāy. The parents called their little boy Muḥammad.

Important relatives in Muhammad's life were his maternal uncle, the amir Qānṣūh, and his paternal cousins Jānim and Jānibak, whose father Qait had come with them to Cairo from Cyprus in the year 900/1495. The two brothers were integrated into the *mamlūk* barracks and became close friends of their cousin Muḥammad.⁹ Little Muḥammad apparently also had a fond relationship with Āqbardī the powerful Great *Dawādār* and cousin of his father.¹⁰

Little is known about al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy prior to his ascension to the throne, except the story of one event which happened when the boy was 13 years old. Around the time of the arrival of his nephews in Egypt, Sultan Qāyṭbāy had decided that his son should enter the *mamlūk* barrack of the Hippodrome, where the incoming young military slaves, who had been purchased in Central Asia, were garrisoned after their arrival in Cairo in order to receive their military training. Sultan Qāyṭbāy told the commander of the barrack to treat Muḥammad as a simple recruit. According to Ibn Iyās this decision was the result of the anger and hate the sultan bore towards his son. After a few days the *Atābak*¹¹ Azbaq took the young boy into his own house, so that he would be at least separated from the others at night.¹² In any case it seems that Qāyṭbāy wanted to prepare his son as successor by ensuring that he would have a real *mamlūk* education and allowing him to build up a *khushdāshiyya* (network of comrades) of his own among the young recruits, as this was around about the same time as Muḥammad's cousins entered the barracks.

When his father died in the summer of 901/1496 Muḥammad was still only fourteen years old and soon found himself caught in the middle of the power struggle of the leading amirs. Ibn Iyās presents the enthronement of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy as the result of the battle of the amirs who could not agree on who should become the successor among them. Therefore, they opted

9 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 308; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, 349. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī says that the brother of the Sultan had spent thirty years in Cyprus, see: Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādīth al-zamān*, vol. 1, p. 382. Nothing is known as to whether there was a good or bad relationship between the maternal uncle and the paternal cousins.

10 Holt, "al-Nāṣir".

11 The *atābak* (commander in chief) represented the second highest position in the realm. Not only did he command the army but he was the sultan's deputy in case of absence. See: Sievert, *Der Herrscherwechsel im Mamlukensultanat*, p. 68. If this anecdote holds true, the sheltering of Muḥammad at night presented a case of insubordination of the *atābak* against the sultan, but apparently with no consequences.

12 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 307; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 349.

for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy in order to gain time to settle the question of real succession at a later date. Two leading amirs were especially prominent in this affair in the aftermath of Qāyṭbāy's death. They were Qānṣūh al-Khamsamīya the new commander in chief (*atābak*) and Kurtbāy al-Aḥmar who became Vizier, *Ustādār* (head of the sultan's household) and inspector of the provinces.¹³ Together they had already plotted against a third rival, the aforementioned cousin of Qāyṭbāy, Āqbardī the Great-*Dawādār* (the keeper of the royal inkwell) who headed the royal administration. After Āqbardī's house in Cairo had been attacked by followers of his rivals in the final days of the old sultan, he had fled and gathered troops in Syria.¹⁴

Āqbardī's return to Egypt was anticipated by many and apparently hoped for by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy, who was secretly looking out for the followers of Āqbardī and then declared an amnesty for them in January 1497 [Jumādā I 902].¹⁵ Qānṣūh al-Khamsamīya responded to these steps by declaring himself sultan in February of 1497 [Jumādā I 902] and besieged the citadel where the young sultan was sheltering. In the battle which now ensued al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy was victorious because his former comrades, the young *mamlūk* recruits, fought for him under the command of his maternal uncle Qānṣūh. Moreover, a unit of black slaves with firearms was deployed very successfully during this skirmish. Qānṣūh al-Khamsamīya finally fled to Syria some days later and was put to death by his arch enemy Āqbardī, the Great *Dawādār*.¹⁶ Afterwards the sultan promoted his uncle Qānṣūh, to the rank of the inspector of beverages (*shādd al-shirābkhāna*). This proved to be the first step in what turned out to be an astonishing career for uncle Qānṣūh.¹⁷

Meanwhile the Great *Dawādār* Āqbardī returned to Cairo and resumed his offices. However, almost immediately he started to plot against the young sultan and his entourage. In August of 1497 (Dhū al-Ḥijja 902) came the turn of Āqbardī to besiege his relative in the Citadel. He put up headquarters in the Mosque complex of Sultan Ḥasan beneath the citadel and attacked al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy and his troops from below. But although Āqbardī had hired an Italian canon caster and was in possession of firearms, he did not succeed in conquering the fortress and went back to Syria.¹⁸ In doing so he could save his head in contrast to the Italian caster Domenico who lost his, which was then shown on a pike on Bāb al-Silsila, the formal entrance to the royal court.¹⁹

13 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 324, 336; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 366, 375.

14 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 322; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 363.

15 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, pp. 339, 341; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 378, 382.

16 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, pp. 343, 350; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 384, 391.

17 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 347; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 387.

18 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, pp. 366–376; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, pp. 406–416.

19 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 375; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 415.

In Syria Āqbardī temporarily managed to take hold of Gaza²⁰ and then tried to gain Damascus but was only able to pillage small villages in the neighborhood. He and his troops nevertheless remained active over the next two years especially in Northern Syria.²¹ At the end of 1497 al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy declared an amnesty for Āqbardī's followers in Cairo and quite a few of them resurfaced. There were even rumors that the sultan had tried to strengthen ties with Āqbardī despite their fighting in summer.²² Finally Āqbardī managed to outlive al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy and re-entered the official political scene when he was nominated as governor of Tripoli in the summer of summer 1499 (904) only to succumb to illness immediately afterwards.²³

But let us return to the summer of 1497 and the victory of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy against Āqbardī and his flight to Syria. We learn that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy again promoted his uncle Qānṣūh who at that time was around thirty years of age, to the office of Great *Dawādār*. Despite this promotion in June 1498 [Dhū al-Qa'da 903] rumors reached Damascus about a fall out between the sultan and his uncle.²⁴ In order to calm the tension the sultan's mother Aṣalḅāy had both men summoned to the Citadel in February 1498 [Rajab 903] and made them swear in her presence on the Quran copy of the third Caliph ʿUthmān (r. 644–656) that they would not fight each other. But this oath turned out meaningless.²⁵ High ranking officers were highly critical of the role Aṣalḅāy played in governmental affairs. Ibn Iyās quotes Kurtḅāy al-Aḥmar, who had meanwhile been sent off from Cairo as viceroy of Damascus, as crying out loud in the council hall of Damascus "We are governed by a boy and a woman!"²⁶

In September 1498 [Safar 904] the sources then speak of a heavy dispute between al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy and his mother about his marriage to the Circassian lady Miṣirḅāy, the widow of Kurtḅāy, the former governor of Gaza and brother of the former *Dawādār* Āqbardī. Ibn Iyās says in this context that this marriage did nothing but bring al-Nāṣir Muḥammad bad luck as he would be killed less than a month later.²⁷ The political intentions behind this marriage remain unclear, but maybe given his parallel activities to grant an amnesty to the followers of Āqbardī al-Nāṣir Muḥammad might have wanted to reconcile with this side of his family, especially when his maternal uncle

20 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*. vol. 3, p. 378; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 419.

21 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*. vol. 3, p. 381; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 422.

22 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*. vol. 3, p. 383 f.; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 424.

23 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*. vol. 3, p. 420 f.; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 460; Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādith*, vol. 2, p. 78.

24 Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufaḅkahat*, vol 1, Cairo 1962, p. 197.

25 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*. vol. 3, p. 387; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 428.

26 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*. vol. 3, p. 406; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 448.

27 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿī*. vol. 3, p. 399; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 441.

went astray. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's death came about in October of 1498 as he went with his two cousins Jānim and Jānibak to the Nile near Giza. There they met the Second *Dawādār* Tuman Bāy with his soldiers at the encampment of Ṭalibiyya. The sultan and his cousins did not expect an attack and were therefore slain on the spot. They fell victim to a complot which was apparently co-mastered by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's maternal uncle Qānṣūh, who then became enthroned as the new Sultan with the regal title al-Malik al-Zāhir.²⁸ A year later al-Zāhir Qānṣūh completed his claim to the sultanate by marrying Miṣirbāy, the widow of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy, as an additional wife.²⁹ According to historical sources, she also did not bring him luck as he was himself toppled from power in June of 1500. The story goes that upon arrival of enemy troops, Qānṣūh fled in women's clothes from the citadel and that was the last to be heard of him.³⁰

His nephew al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy was buried in the Mausoleum of Qāyrbāy in Cairo's Northern Cemetery, beside the tomb of his father. He was survived by his mother Aṣalbāy who went on to lead a remarkable life which was very closely bound to the sultanate. She was at first the concubine of Sultan Qāyrbāy, then the mother of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy, later the sister of Sultan al-Zāhir Qānṣūh (r. 1498–1500), then the wife of Sultan al-Ashraf Jān Bulāṭ (r. 1500–1501) until Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1516) forced her to go into exile after her pilgrimage to Mecca in 914/1508. She died in Mecca one year later.³¹

3 The Sources

The main source for the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy is the chronicle of the contemporary Egyptian scholar Ibn Iyās (d. around 1524), *Badā'ī' al-zuhūr fī waqā'ī' al-duhūr*. But Ibn Iyās deeply despised al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy, and the obituary of the ill-fated young sultan reads as follows: "He was said to have possessed an incredible generosity and that he was very brave, but he was a brute with a fast hand. He loved to spill blood, had no manners and liked the company of the lowest people in society".³² Almost everything the

28 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, pp. 401, 404; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 444, 446.

29 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 426; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 466.

30 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p., 436; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 476.; Petrus Martyr Anglerius a Spanish envoy who visited Cairo in 1501 says in contrast, that Qānṣūh had been taken prisoner and brought to the Citadel of Alexandria, Anglerius, *Legatio Babylonica*, p. 265.

31 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 4, pp. 131, 159.

32 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 402; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 444.

young sultan did is described by Ibn Iyās as “something never heard of” and the comments always have negative connotations. For example, when the sultan commands that houses near the waterfront should be lit in the evenings, Ibn Iyās commentates this by saying that the sultan ordered it because he and his cousins wanted to look from their boat through the windows of the houses to check on the women inside. If they were pleased with what they saw they entered the house and captured the women.³³

It is anyone’s guess why Ibn Iyās paints this negative image of the sultan. It seems that he was a staunch supporter of the old Mamluk system of governance of Qāyṭbāy and his predecessors. For him a new sultan should come out of the ranks of the experienced amirs and not be the young son of the deceased ruler, and more than once Ibn Iyās complains of the foolishness of the young sultan.³⁴ Moreover, Ibn Iyās argues that the sultan had taken away property and salaries of the descendants of *mamlūks* (*awlād al-nās*). Ibn Iyās, who was himself a grandson of a *mamlūk* soldier, believed that such confiscations were highly deplorable as they threatened his income base. In any case, Ibn Iyās is responsible for most of the bad press which al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy has received in historical writing until now.³⁵ Other contemporary authors like Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (d. 934/1528) and the Damascene author Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 953/1546) do not add much detail to the life of the sultan, but they take a more or less neutral stance.³⁶

We find a more literary approach, which however is far more positive towards the sultan, in a work entitled *al-Badr al-zāhir fī nuṣrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*, which Peter Holt attributes to Ibn Shiḥna (d. 921/1515) a Ḥanbalī judge from Aleppo who frequently traveled to Cairo. This Ibn Shiḥna was an eyewitness of the defeat of Qānṣūh al-Khamsamiya in 1497. That is the only historical account described in the work, and besides the siege passage, the book contains

33 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 3, p. 397; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 440.

34 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 3, pp. 339, 397, 406; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, pp. 379, 440, 448.

35 For example, David Ayalon mentions as reasons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy’s downfall his “unstable character, his being the son of a Mamluk and not himself a Mamluk, the great contrast between him and his illustrious father”, see: Ayalon, *Gunpowder and Firearms in the Mamluk Kingdom*, p. 71. Garcin speaks of a “fifteen year old sultan who was said to be unbalanced”, see: Garcin, “The regime of the Circassian Mamluks”, p. 296. Loiseau describes the beginning of his reigns as follows: “Son avènement en 1496 à l’âge de quatorze ans ouvrit une période d’instabilité et d’affrontements qui se solda par son assassinat deux ans plus tard”, see Loiseau, *Les Mamloukes, XIIIe–XVIIe siècle*, p. 135. Haarmann explains the revolt against Qāyṭbāy by his outrageous recruitment of black slaves, although these units must have existed prior to his ascendance to the throne, see: Haarmann, “Der arabische Osten”, p. 252.

36 Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, *Ḥawādith*, vol. 2, pp. 9–59; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahat*, pp. 167–205.

eulogies on the virtues of the young sultan. The final part also contains a collection of sixteen dreams that all predict the victory of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy.³⁷ The existence of such a work hints at the fact that there had been feelings of sympathy towards Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy in the Sultanate and that he was not as negatively seen as other sources portray him.

The story of the rise and decline of the young sultan even fascinated European travelers. The German knight and pilgrim Arnold von Harff visited Cairo in the aftermath of the defeat of Qānṣūh al-Khamsamiya. His work contains the only existing drawing of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy (see figure 4.1). During his stay in Cairo, von Harff speaks about court politics, which he has apparently discussed in wine-drinking sessions with two German-speaking *mamlūks* he met in Cairo. Von Harff describes how, according to his informants, since the time of the biblical Joseph, who had been sold by his brothers, sultans had to have roots in slavery, heathendom and foreign origins. Nevertheless, this young sultan had now challenged that tradition and so far fought off all his enemies. However, at the time when he wrote down his travel experience back home in Germany, von Harff was wondering what might have happened to the young sultan in the meantime.³⁸

The Northern Italian religious scholar Petrus Martyr Anglerius already knew something about the fate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy, when he visited Egypt in 1501/2. In Egypt he acted as Spanish envoy and tried to convince Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī that the conquest of Granada was in fact an internal matter for the Spanish and should not hamper the traditional good relations between Spain and the Sultanate.³⁹ Of high interest for the present chapter is Anglerius' portrayal of the turbulent reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy. According to Petrus Martyr Anglerius the old Sultan Qāyṭbāy had never consented to the succession of his son as he feared for his son's life. The amirs, however, had at first agreed to put the young son on the throne, as they had no clear favorite among them. Therefore, Muḥammad was declared sultan by the Egyptian High Priest ("a summo eorum pontifice"), i.e. the caliph. However, the young sultan then misbehaved badly from the beginning of his reign. He planned to kill all his enemies at a banquet, even including his uncle. This plan was indeed so horrible that his mother revealed it to her brother Qānṣūh. Qānṣūh then had Muḥammad killed and used his personal network to become

37 Ibn Shihna, *al-Badr al-zāhīr*; see for a description of author and manuscript: Holt, "Literary offerings", pp. 12–13.

38 Von Harff, *Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Harff*, pp. 86–89.

39 Anglerius, *Legatio Babylonica*, pp. 53–55.

the new sultan.⁴⁰ We do not have the exact source of this information but it might be that the Spanish-born Taghrī Birdī, the well-known translator (dragoman) of the royal court in Cairo might be behind this official information as he was in contact with the envoy.⁴¹

4 Reviving the Legacy of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn

Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy and his supporters knew that staying in power was a difficult task for a sultan's son in the fifteenth century. In this context it is a matter of speculation whether his father Qāyrbāy was behind the plan to stay in office, or not. However, the fact that he placed his son as a simple recruit in the barracks might hint at the fact that Qāyrbāy indeed wanted his son to become his successor or at least a full member of the military elite. When al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy and his circle then decided to assume power, it seems quite a logical move to evoke the image of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn as a case in point for the rule of a sultan's son. Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn had managed to become a very powerful sultan in the early fourteenth century, despite being the son of a sultan and not being imported as a military slave at a young age. Twice al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn had been installed as a sultan at an early age by the amirs of his father and twice he had again lost power. When he finally ascended the throne for the third time in 1310 at the age of 25 he experienced a long and stable rule from 1310 to 1341. Amalia Levanoni has written a substantial monograph on al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, and she explains his success by the fact that he undermined the existing traditions of the old members of the military elite through a number of reforms, yet at the same time gathered enough support from other parts of the military establishment especially among the young soldiers, so that his controversial reforms could be successful.⁴² More recently, Jo Van Steenberghe and Willem Flinterman have argued that the power transition under al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, from elder grandees of his father who were pushed aside by him to form a new entourage, might have been smoother than Levanoni suggested. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn was helped in changing the elites by his family network and a more docile and ambitious generation of younger amirs who had spent their career with him. In addition to this he gathered around him

40 Anglerius, *Legatio Babylonica*, pp. 260–263.

41 On Taghrī Birdī, see: Anglerius, *Legatio Babylonica*, pp. 81–91.

42 Levanoni, *A Turning point in Mamluk History*, pp. 29–80. (Chapter two: Undermining traditions).

ambitious *mamlūks* of a similar age to him who had depended on Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn's sultanlic predecessors or defeated rivals. As their former masters were out of favor or dead the career outlooks of these younger *mamlūks* had been bleak; therefore, they were ready to support al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn when he offered them unexpected new opportunities.⁴³

Remarkable parallels appear when we realize that in the late fifteenth century al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy tried to pursue the same path as al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn in the fourteenth century, with a young entourage bolstered with the support of middle-aged amirs in order to get rid of the elder grandees of his father. Similar to the initial experiences of his famous namesake, however, the young Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy's chances of success were rather bleak. The grandees of his father never seem to have considered the actual possibility that he might stand in office for long. As depicted above they had already started the power race by fighting amongst themselves; they did not expect to be rivalled by the young sultan. The young sultan therefore had to make a symbolic entrance in the game by literally "throwing his hat in the ring" in order to be taken seriously as a contender.

However, before declaring his claim, he had to choose a regal name. According to Ibn Iyās the honorary name (*laqab*) "al-Manṣūr" was briefly considered for unknown reasons. "Al-Manṣūr" might have pointed to the father of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (r. 1279–1290), but the name al-Nāṣir was soon chosen to legitimize the dynastic claim.⁴⁴ Still, in the beginning the use of the royal style al-Nāṣir appears not really to have been seen as provocative for the establishment. However, the first uproar was soon to come as al-Nāṣir Muḥammad committed what was considered outrageous behavior.

One month after the death of his father, in September 1496 [Muḥarram of 902], al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy appeared at the Friday prayer with something on his head which clearly shocked the present amirs. Ibn Iyās reports: "The peak of the fickleness of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was that he went to the

43 Flinterman and Van Steenberghe, "Al-Nasir Muhammad and the formation of the Qalawunid State", pp. 95–98 ("The Social Production of al-Nasir Muhammad's State").

44 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 333; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 372. However, in the turmoil of the fighting against Qānṣūh al-Khamsamīya at the beginning of 1497 young *mamlūk* soldiers demanded that he should change his name from al-Nāṣir to al-Ashraf like his father. The reason was that they felt disfavored when they carried the common name al-Nāṣiriya, which identified them as being bought by the young sultan instead of the Ashrafiya of Qāyrbāy. According to Ibn Iyās the soldiers achieved the change, but it does not seem that al-Ashraf was really used in any context, see: Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 35; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 391.

Friday prayer without wearing a *kallawta* on his head, instead he wore only a *takhfifa ṣaghīra* and this shocked the amirs and they harshly criticized such a behavior”.⁴⁵ However, the amirs did not limit themselves to verbal criticism. One month later, the highest ranking amirs, the commanders of a thousand, reacted in a very creative way: through fashion. They brought out a new headgear, modifying the official so-called *takhfifa kabīra* (‘the greater lighter one’) by putting horns on it.⁴⁶ According to Ibn Iyās the amirs said that this new headgear arrangement was inspired by Dhū al-Qarnayn, the two-horned hero of the Quran [18: 83–98], who is commonly identified as Iskandar, or Alexander the Great, considered by contemporaries as the prototype of the Muslim hero. Veneration of Alexander had become increasingly popular in the fifteenth century, especially through the *Iskandernama* of the Ottoman poet Ahmādī (d. 1413).⁴⁷ Ibn Iyās explains in another more detailed passage about the royal role of *takhfifa kabīra*: “It nowadays takes the place of the crown of the kings of Egypt; with it the Turks show their might. It was worn by the Persian kings before” (see also figure 4.2).⁴⁸

Although one might downplay the effects of these clothing issues, one has to bear in mind that Syro-Egyptian society was highly ritualized when it came to public outings of the Sultanate’s leaderships. Changes of style were therefore very meaningful. The intention of the leading amirs may well have been to show the young sultan that their rights to power were far better founded than his. Still this was not the end of the dispute. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy showed them afterwards publicly what he thought about their new headgear creation. In the month of April 1497 [Sha‘bān 902] shortly after he had defeated Qānṣūh al-Khamsamīya, so Ibn Iyās narrates, he bestowed the *takhfifa* with horns on Wafā, a gardener. Needless to say, in his report Ibn Iyās expressed outrage at this, as Wafā was one of the common people who should wear the simple turban.⁴⁹

In the context of headgear, it is interesting to note that in the early fourteenth century al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn had also had renewed facets of the official headgear. Around the end of the thirteenth century the color of the so-called *kallawta* cap switched from yellow to red. *Mamlūk* soldiers and amirs then started wrapping a turban around the *kallawta*. This new arrangement became the official headgear under al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn and

45 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 3, p. 339; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 379.

46 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 3, p. 340; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 380.

47 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 3, p. 340; Watt, “al-Iskandar”; Abel, “Iskandar Nāma”.

48 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 4, p. 332.

49 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 3, p. 359; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 400.



FIGURE 4.2 Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1516) wearing the *Takhfifa Kabira*
GIOVIO, *VITAE ILLUSTRUM VIRORUM*, P. 221

the old-style tricorn *sharbūsh* worn by earlier sultans went out of fashion.⁵⁰ While it seems that the initial change from yellow to red had already been ordered by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's brother Sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 1290–1293), the *kallawta*-cap arrangement with the turban grew much bigger in size and was also of better quality during his own long reign. It was then combined with another innovation. In 732/ 1332 al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn went on pilgrimage and had his head completely shaven. After coming home, he kept his bald head instead of growing back the long hair that used to fall down loosely

50 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa-al-ʿtibār*, vol. 3, p. 328.

on the neck, as was the custom. According to the secretary al-Qalqashandī this look was then copied by his entourage and he became a trendsetter.⁵¹

As there is a lack of direct evidence here one can only speculate that there exists a direct connection between the two headgear changes of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy. But given the wider context and the argumentation of this chapter, it seems likely that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy might have heard of the fashion acts of his namesake and wanted to make a political statement through similar symbolic actions.

Another point where we can find interesting similarities between the two leaders is in the field of military reform. Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn undertook several changes in the military organization of his realm. Perhaps the most famous of these was his reform (sg. *rawk*) of the *iqṭāʿ* system used for the remuneration of the army. He rearranged the system in order to generate more income for the sultan and his central apparatus of power. The income of the leading amirs was thereby diminished as they received less *iqṭāʿ*-land than before.⁵²

In the case of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy we see similar actions used to create ties with *mamlūk* leaderships. An example is the land tenure privileges at the early beginning of his reign, when he was still much endangered by the activities of Qānṣūh al-Khamsamīya. In August 1496 (Dhū al-ḥijja 901) Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy is said to have distributed to *mamlūk* amirs around 1,000 *iqṭāʿ*'s which had previously belonged to the *dhakhīra* (treasure/ source of royal income)⁵³, the reserve of his father. He therefore opened up the royal resources in order to buy loyalty.⁵⁴ We do not know who actually benefitted from this act in reality, however it is one of the few measures taken by the young sultan about which we do not hear any complaints by Ibn Iyās.

Quite the contrary holds true for another action undertaken by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy which according to Ibn Iyās constituted an abominable act, and was something no sultan had ever done before. What had happened? In January 1498 (Jumādā I 903) al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy had ordered an increase in the number of *mamlūks* which each amir had to maintain. The

51 al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-ʿashā*, vol. 4, pp. 39–40. See on the issue of Mamluk headgear: Fuess, "Sultans with Horns".

52 See: Sato, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam*; Levanoni, *A Turning Point*, pp. 53–60.

53 See for the meaning of the term *dhakhīra* under Sultan Qāyrbāy: Igarashi, *Land Tenure, Fiscal Policy*, p. 129.

54 Ibn Iyās, *Badāʿīʿ*. vol. 3, p. 335; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 374. Ibn Shiḥna, *al-Badr al-Zāhir*, p. 51. See for the question of the sultan's fisc: Daisuke, *Land Tenure, Fiscal Policy*, pp. 121–138 (especially p. 131 on al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy).



FIGURE 4.3 Mamluk soldiers wearing the red *kallawta* cap with turban, 1470
 PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, MS ARABE 282, IBN AKHĪ KHUZAM,
 KITĀB AL-MAKHZŪN JĀMĪ' AL-FUNŪN, FOL. 28

“commanders of thousand”⁵⁵ had to finance an additional 30, the “amirs of 40” had to sustain 10 more and the “amirs of 10” had to bring an additional five.⁵⁶ However, the financial resources of the amirs were not augmented to compensate for this, so this actual growth of their financial burden by 30% was a hard blow for the amirs. Once again one could speculate that both actions concerning land tenure resonated with the practice of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn in the sense that the latter had earlier also tried to assure loyalties by giving

55 The amir of 100 *mamlūk* horsemen and 1,000 infantrymen (*amīr mi'a wa-muqaddam alf*) represented the highest rank in the military hierarchy. As the name suggests, he usually had to equip 100 *mamlūks*. There were a maximum of 24 commanders of 1,000 at the same time and the highest position in the state were exclusively drawn from among them. The amir of 40 commanded 40 *mamlūks* and the amir of 10 accordingly 10.

56 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i'*. vol. 3, p. 385; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 425.

presents, and only later had he reformed the system in order to get a firmer financial grip on the amirs.

In general, raising money was a necessity in 1496. At that time the Sultanate needed additional resources to combat the external threat represented by the expanding Ottoman Empire, especially in the field of new military techniques and the use of guns and firearms.⁵⁷ As already stated above, the son followed a path in these reforms which his father had first taken in order to strengthen his military force. The young sultan, however, appears to have wanted to also use the opportunity to overthrow the old elite with the help of the new units. It actually was a unit of black slaves with rifles that helped the young sultan win the wars against the amirs Qānṣūh al-Khamsamīya and Āqbardī. When the sultan descended from the citadel into town he was usually accompanied by his cousins Jānibak and Jānim and a troop of black slaves with rifles marching in front of them.⁵⁸ This not only raised the anger of the amirs, but even the young *mamlūk* soldiers were not too happy to share their important role and economic resources in the state with black slaves whom they looked down on because of prevalent forms of racial stereotyping.⁵⁹

Ibn al-Ḥimsī presents us with a report of an event which highlights this rivalry. According to this story, in February of 1498 [Jumādā II 903], the young sultan gave Faraj Allāh, who was the chief of the black slave rifle squadron, the right to wear clothes and headgear originally reserved for the *mamlūk* military elite and also gave him the right to marry a white Circassian slave girl. When the *mamlūks* of the young sultan saw this, they took to their arms and killed Faraj and 50 of the 500 black slaves, and in the fight lost only two of their own. After this incident al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's advisors persuaded the sultan to stop equipping black slaves with rifles and to abstain from nocturnal outings with them. He promised to sell the black slaves to the Turkmen.⁶⁰ If this story is true it was a serious setback for the sultan. According to this version, not only did

57 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*, vol. 3, p. 269, footnote 14; see for the issue of Mamluk firearms: Fuess, "Les Janissaires, les Mamlouks et les armes à feu".

58 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*, vol. 3, p. 387; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 427.

59 Unfortunately it is unclear how much they earned. In principle of course they were slaves but there had to be a kind of remuneration. We know for example that Sultan Qāyrbāy had a firearm unit formed out of sons of *mamlūks* (the so-called *awlād al-nās*) at the beginning of the 1490s and they received only half of the monthly payment of a full *mamlūk* soldier, i.e. 1,000 dirhams compared to 2,000 *dirhams*, see: Ayalon, *Gunpowder*, 65. Of course the contemporary racism meant that black slaves would have to do it for much a lower payment; but in my opinion it is improbable that they would have served without any salary even given their slave status. It is hard to imagine giving a slave a gun and then expecting service for free.

60 Ibn al-Ḥimsī, *Ḥawādith*, vol. 2, pp. 36–37.

he lose an important pillar for his military plans but he also had to balance his young *mamlūks* with the new unit of black slaves in order to counterbalance the veteran amirs. This was certainly a very difficult task.

Be it as it may, this episode did not bring about the end of infantry units of black slaves with guns in the Sultanate's army. In fact, the Sultanate's leadership tried to acquire as many guns as possible in order to compete with the Ottomans. As black slaves were the cheapest slaves on the market and guns were easy to handle compared to other contemporary weapons, for obvious economic reasons the gun-carrying infantry units continued to be composed of black slaves. One case in point is the aforementioned powerful amir Kurtbāy al-Aḥmar ("The Red") who was appointed as governor of Damascus. At the beginning of the year 904 [August 1498], al-Aḥmar ordered the people of Damascus to provide him with money and black slaves. He then trained a large group of black slaves to use firearms and formed a unit which upheld public security. Apparently because of his nickname "the red" they wore red clothes and red caps.⁶¹ There was therefore an ongoing continuity in the gun business and the black slaves using them. We hear for example of 500 black slaves with guns who were sent by Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī on a military expedition to the Hijaz in the spring of 1503 (Shawwāl 908).⁶²

5 Looking for Allies

As argued above, when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy deliberately took on the old elite he somehow stepped into the footsteps of his namesake of the fourteenth century. As was described above, he engaged in direct confrontations with these veteran amirs, leaving the first of his powerful opponents dead and forced the second to flee to Northern Syria. The third very powerful amir, Kurtbāy al-Aḥmar, seems to have stayed loyal, but the sultan preferred to send him away from Cairo as governor of Damascus.

Nonetheless, in order to carry out his plans to oust the old guard from power and go on with his reforms he would have needed more support than a unit of black slave soldiers could provide. He tried to bolster his power base in two ways. The first was to get the populace behind him. The second was to create a personal network of family, friends and military comrades. It seems that he succeeded in the first aim. He gained a positive image among the common people, as even Ibn Iyās had to admit. Although Ibn Iyās comments that the

61 Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahat*, vol. 1, p. 201.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 17–173.

young sultan did only evil things during his numerous outings, it seems that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy gained popularity by his public appearances especially by making the public space safe which had been hard hit by the two subsequent military sieges of the citadel. At one point in his account Ibn Iyās remarks that the young man was not bothered about acting with the dignity of his office, as his predecessors had done, and that he behaved like an ordinary policeman instead.⁶³

As a result, it seems that he succeeded in restoring public order. However, he clearly misjudged the reliability of his family network. As he openly promoted a legitimacy based on family ties from father to son he needed the support of all family members. His closest allies were his two cousins Jānibak and Jānim who were later killed with him. Then there were *mamlūk* comrades who, just like his two cousins, had gone with him to the barracks. He might therefore have gained the support of the young *mamlūk* soldiers who were of his age. He even actively promoted some of these. One example can be seen in a young man with the name of Qānṣūh b. Sultan Jarkass who was appointed at the beginning of 1498 to the office of *Hājib* (chamberlain) of Damascus. This was seen as exceptional because of his very young age.⁶⁴ Moreover, he regularly promoted members of his family to higher ranks as in the case of his maternal uncle Qānṣūh. It seems that his mother was also active behind the scene to get alliances working.⁶⁵

However, he did misjudge his family network as ultimately two members of his family would fail him. The first was the cousin of his father, the Great *Dawādār* Āqbardī, who besieged al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy in the citadel. According to Ibn Iyās, Āqbardī had stated that it was nothing personal and argued publicly that he did not fight the young sultan but only his bad advisors who belonged into prison.⁶⁶ This time around al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy could overcome the threat, but with his maternal uncle Qānṣūh things turned out differently. Although al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy had promoted Qānṣūh to high office after their common military victories, they fell out for unknown reasons and as we have seen, not even Aṣalbāy the mother of the sultan could breach the rift. Qānṣūh was finally convinced by other amirs (seemingly from the reconciled households of Qānṣūh al-Khamsamīya and Āqbardī) to get rid of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy. The price they had to offer was something

63 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 387; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 427.

64 Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahat*, vol. 1, p. 203.

65 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 361; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 401.

66 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 366; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 407.

which al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy would never offer to Qānṣūh, i.e. the sultanate.⁶⁷

The wish to conclude alliances could also be felt in external relations. An Ottoman source speaks of a marriage project between one of the daughters of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid (r. 1481–1512) and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy. This would obviously have strengthened the young sultan's position. Bayezid might have preferred to marry his daughter to a young sultan of dynastic lineage instead of an old sultan who had started his life as a slave.⁶⁸ After the assassination of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy Sultan Bayezid apparently protested in a hefty manner and showed his disappointment.⁶⁹

6 Conclusion

The reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy represented a troublesome period full of fighting and deceit. Thanks to Ibn Iyās, Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad has a very negative image and he is perceived in historiography as having played only a minor role. However, al-Nāṣir followed up on reforms especially in the military sector which his father Qāyrbāy had already begun. These initiatives were then continued by his successors, because the circumstances of this time period simply required them. What went against him was that, at the end of the fifteenth century Mamluk military society had become very reluctant to hand power over to an inexperienced juvenile.

Parallels with the image of al-Nāṣir Muhammad b. Qalāwūn, or what contemporaries thought they knew about that figure, may perhaps have helped al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy to counter any accusations of a lack of experience. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy and his entourage knew they had to be wary of the grandees of his father and had to build a network of powerful people, but, unfortunately, they could not get enough people to back them for long enough. Nevertheless, as his reign represents the longest of any ruling son of a sultan after the reign of al-Nāṣir Faraj b. Barqūq (r. 1309–1405; 1405–1412) at the beginning of the fifteenth century, this might still count as a kind of a success.

Despite all the parallels and similarities, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyrbāy did not develop into a second al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn. However, Ibn Iyās remarks, the former's career and death did resemble that of the brother of the

67 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 400; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 443.

68 Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, p. 161.

69 Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, p. 161; Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī'*. vol. 3, p. 411; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, p. 453.

latter and another son of Qalāwūn, al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 1290–1293), who was also slain by rival amirs while hunting near Giza.⁷⁰ Therefore al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy followed the model of at least one son of Qalāwūn right to the end. Seen from his personal perspective this was certainly the wrong model to follow. In any case it is remarkable that Ibn Iyās mentions this unsuccessful son of Qalāwūn in the context of the death of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qāyṭbāy, because he actually seems to have tried in vain to copy the other son, his famous namesake. The young sultan might even have been equally successful if not for the fact that at the end of the fifteenth century the dynastic principle was over for good and the Sultanate was fully “mamlukized”. The old *mamlūk* elite proved unwilling to accept the attempts of a sultan’s son to conquer the throne by a total replacement of old rituals and institutions. Therefore, that *mamlūk* elite prevailed and in 1501, the succession crisis was finally ended by Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1516), a member of the traditional elite. What is remarkable is that al-Ghawrī had to continue the path of reforms because of the Ottoman threat. There was simply not the possibility to keep the status quo. Still as Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī had been the successful candidate of the “deep Mamluk state”, his reforms were disliked but much less contested as he did not challenge the system as a whole.

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70 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’*. vol. 3, 402; Ibn Iyās, *Histoire*, 444.

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Tales of Viziers and Wine: Interpreting Early Ottoman Narratives of State Centralization

Dimitri Kastritsis

The dominant paradigm of Ottoman state-building is one of progressive centralization and institutionalization, from the late fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century CE. This paradigm was first developed by Paul Wittek in the 1930s, and later refined by Halil İnalcık and others.¹ According to Wittek's well-known thesis, the Ottoman state-building venture was at first an egalitarian affair. Frontiersmen with a more or less tribal and nomadic background, possessing a deep religious devotion embodied by holy men, carried out religiously motivated raids (*ğazā*) into Christian territory. By means of such activity, they were able to push the frontiers of Islam from the Anatolian borders of Byzantium to the Danube and Adriatic. But as the borders of their principality grew and its frontier advanced into Europe, a hinterland developed, in which the need for central state institutions became apparent. Such institutions were modelled on those already present in other Islamic states. They included *shari'a* courts, taxation based on population surveys, and employment of slaves in the army and state administration. Since at first the Ottoman principality consisted of territory newly conquered for Islam, in order to build such institutions, there was a need for scholars (*ulema*, Ar. *ʿulamā*) imported from outside the Ottoman borders. Members of this new class (distinct from the holy men already mentioned) entered the Ottoman domains from rival Muslim principalities to the east. At first they mainly came from the neighboring Turkish emirates (*beyliks*) of Anatolia. Some of these emirates enjoyed considerable prestige in the region, and their competitive relationship with the Ottomans meant that people coming from them were viewed with suspicion.

According to the Wittek paradigm, such negative perceptions were rooted in more than just political rivalry, but could ultimately be traced to cultural differences. For to the original founders of the Ottoman state (the *ğāzī* frontiersmen),

1 Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*. On Wittek's ideas, see especially Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*; Wittek, ed. Heywood, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*. Publications reflecting the later formulation include İnalcık "Ottoman Methods of Conquest"; İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire*; Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1.

the newcomers were so different that they were perceived as threatening a former way of life. However, despite initial *ġāzī* resistance, after the conquest of Constantinople (1453), it became more difficult to question the nature of the empire and its institutions, many of which had been created by the aforementioned scholars. So the disenfranchised frontiersmen were forced to take out their frustrations in the field of literature. How else to explain the fact that histories compiled in the late fifteenth century include colorful stories, in which scholars and bureaucrats are vilified as the root of all evil in Ottoman society? In these accounts, the villains par excellence are the Çandarlı family of viziers, whose members dominated Ottoman central administration in the century preceding the conquest of Constantinople. Unlike later magnates, who were mostly of slave origin (*kul*), the Çandarlı were members of the *ulema*. But they were also known for their diplomatic skills. Their last prominent member, Çandarlı Halil Paşa, was executed following the conquest of Constantinople, because he had favored a more flexible approach toward the Christian world. After this event, the entire family was disgraced, hence their vilification in the aforementioned texts. Or so the story goes.

It is not my purpose here to call into question the basic contours of the above paradigm, which however reductionist at times is not without its merits. In many respects, the scholarly debate over Wittek's ideas has generated more heat than light over the past few decades, and it would be counterproductive to engage in any further polemics. Thanks to the work of Cemal Kafadar, Colin Heywood, and others, it is now mostly clear what is of value about Wittek's theory and where the main problems lie.² What is still largely absent, however, is a clear, detailed understanding of the historical evolution of Ottoman government and society in the century preceding 1453. Both Wittek's and Kafadar's books are essentially extended essays, while Heywood's work has focused on the intellectual underpinnings of Wittek's ideas more than on early Ottoman history *per se*. Moreover, the focus of these works has been largely on the period of Ottoman history that is the most difficult to understand—namely, the reigns of the first three Ottoman rulers (Osman, Orhan, and Murad I, 1299–1389). This was a time when the Ottoman principality was not a major power, so sources are few and far between. But in fact, far more can be done with the following century: the period that witnessed the first Ottoman attempt at empire, its collapse, its reconstruction, and its definitive establishment

² For analysis and bibliography, see the above cited works by Kafadar and Heywood. See also Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*. Yürekli, *Architecture and Hagiography*, 65–78 also contains a useful discussion of the role of *ġāzī* elements in the production of alternative narratives of Ottoman state formation.

under Mehmed II (1389–1481).³ There is no recent monograph on this period as a whole, and despite the pioneering work of Halil İnalcık and others,⁴ our understanding of the Ottoman state, culture and institutions is still much poorer than that of the sixteenth-century ‘classical age’.

The present contribution is of limited scope. Its aim is to demonstrate that there is much to be gained from considering Ottoman narratives of the central state and its actors intertextually, as well as in light of the specific historical context, however unclear this may sometimes be. In order for such study to be possible, it is necessary to move beyond the familiar boundaries of language and genre. As we will see, careful consideration of the various stories about the Çandarlı and other elite actors, which survive not only in Turkish, but also in other languages, reveals that these tales are more widespread and complex than has thusfar been appreciated. Far from mere fabrications with obvious moral and political agendas, the tales have their own history, which in many cases spans a century or more. Not infrequently, they were originally rooted in actual events and situations, which may sometimes be traced even through archival records. Nevertheless, the relationship between historical reality and representation is still far from straightforward. Stories were altered through oral and textual transmission and adapted to suit changing political agendas, as well as the needs of different genres and audiences. However, by viewing them in the appropriate historical and literary context, it is often possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of the social tensions brought about by the Ottoman state-building enterprise.

1 The Çandarlı viziers and the Wittek Thesis

When discussing the rise of a discourse opposed to state centralization and its protagonists, historians have pointed to the key role played by the disaster of 1402, in which Timur dismembered the first Ottoman attempt at empire and

3 On this point, see Darling, “Introduction: Ottoman Identity”, 53. Franz Babinger’s monograph on Mehmed II (Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror*) is dated, and there is still no extensive study of the reigns of Murad I and Bayezid I, the period that witnessed the first Ottoman attempt at empire. Murphey, “Bayezid I’s Foreign Policy Plans and Priorities” is a step in the right direction, but is only a chapter in an edited volume. My own *Sons of Bayezid* shows what can be done with a single decade by carefully interpreting a variety of available documentary and narrative sources in different languages.

4 See especially İnalcık, *Fatih Devri Üzerinde Tetkikler ve Vesikalar*; Imber, *The Ottoman Empire 1300–1481*.

left the Ottomans in a state of civil war.⁵ As we will see below, it is indeed the case that sources datable to the immediate aftermath of the event in question already contain stories about the Çandarlı family, which had by that time already produced two powerful viziers, Kara Halil and Ali Paşa (d. 1406). The presence of such stories should come as no surprise, for there is every indication that Ottoman attempts to create a centralized empire before 1402, a process in which the Çandarlı had been intimately involved, had been highly controversial. It is only natural that the failure of these efforts would have vindicated those opposed to them all along. More surprising, however, is that some of the key elements of the discourse of opposition can be traced to one of the Ottoman princely courts of the time, that of Mehmed I, who reigned in parts of Anatolia from 1402–13, then as single Ottoman ruler until 1421. This curious fact, which will be discussed in detail in the coming pages, suggests that the discourse in question was intimately connected to political struggles at the highest levels of government. The implication is a political and social situation more complex than has so far been recognized. Of course, accepting these court connections does not disprove Wittek's contention that discontented *ğāzī* frontiersmen are ultimately behind such perspectives. But at the very least, it complicates the story; for as we will see, it suggests that widespread anti-Çandarlı sentiment (*ğāzī* or otherwise) was manipulated for political gain. Moreover, although the tensions present at the turn of the fifteenth century were not resolved in earnest until the end of that century, when the vilification of the Çandarlı received its final formulation, earlier in the century the political situation was apparently more fluid, and so was the discourse. Indeed, it is this very fluidity that permitted such narratives to be deployed by such a wide range of groups and individuals, even including the court of an Ottoman prince.

In the pages that follow, I will focus largely on the negative presentation of the Çandarlı viziers in narrative sources, and the interpretive gaps that arise when this is understood simply by reference to the Wittek paradigm. But before proceeding, it is necessary to introduce the reader to the problem and its history. In modern historical scholarship, the vilification of the Çandarlı in early Ottoman literature has been evident for at least a century. It first attracted the attention of scholars with Friedrich Giese's publication in 1922 of a corpus of historical texts from the fifteenth century, which have come to be known as the *Anonymous Chronicles of the House of Osman* (*Tevāriḫ-i Āl-i 'Osmān*,

5 See especially Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 93–95.

hereafter *Anonymous Chronicles*).⁶ Among its many strands, this corpus contains such passages as the following:

At that time [the reign of Murād I (1362–89)] ... the rulers [pādishāh] were not greedy. Whatever came into their hands they gave away again, and they did not know what a treasury was. But when [Çandarlı] Hayreddin Pasha came to the Gate [of government] greedy scholars became the companions of the rulers. They began by displaying piety and then went on to issue rulings. “He who is a ruler must have a treasury”, they said ... Whatever oppression and corruption there is in this country is due to scholars. ... [They] commit adultery and pederasty, lend money on interest, and make no difference between permitted and forbidden. ... Until Vulkoglu’s daughter came to him, Yıldırım Khan did not know what drinking parties were. He did not drink and held no carouses. In the times of Osmān, Orkhān Ghāzi, and Murād, wine was not drunk. At that time there were ulema who made their words effective. At that time the Sultans were ashamed before the ulema. ... When the Persians and the Karamanlis became the companions of the princes of the house of Osmān, these princes committed all kinds of sins. ... Until then nothing was known of keeping account books. The practice of accumulating money and storing it in a treasury comes from them. ... When [Çandarlı] ‘Alī Pasha ... became vizier, sin and wickedness increased. ... The house of Osmān was a sturdy people, but these outsiders came to them and introduced all kinds of tricks.⁷

The above summary was compiled by Cemal Kafadar, who has spoken of an “exceptionally poignant line of criticism” against schoolmen (*dānişmends*) and other educated people (*ulema*) who came to the Ottoman domains from cultural centers further east.⁸ Like others before him, Kafadar has traced such views to frontier elements opposed to state centralization, while at the same time complicating the picture by considering a wider cultural setting in which this discourse should be understood. Despite the undoubtable value of such contextualization, however, what is still largely absent is a detailed understanding of

6 Anonymous, ed. Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*. For some basic information on this source, see Kastritsis, “Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles”. See also Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 96, 102–116.

7 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 111. Original translations from Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad*, vol. 1, 135–141.

8 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 110.

the full scope of these views, as well as the specific historical context in which they evolved.

Before turning to some examples of what such a broader approach may offer, a few more words are in order about the history of the existing interpretation. Just seven years after the publication of Giese's edition of the *Anonymous Chronicles*, Wittek collaborated with Franz Taeschner on an important article which presented the careers and major monuments of the Çandarlı family's principle members.⁹ Although this work is still useful today, as one might expect for a historical study dating to the 1920s, it is mostly a positivist exercise with little to say about the wider questions that concern us here. To the extent that the *Anonymous Chronicles* are mentioned at all, they are treated mainly as a source of more or less reliable historical data. The hostile attitudes present in these texts are mentioned in passing, then quickly dismissed as a predictable reaction against unpopular reforms and the rising power of the *ulema*.¹⁰

In fact, Wittek would make his position clearer in two subsequent publications.¹¹ The first was *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (1938), a slim book for which Wittek is mostly remembered today, in which somewhat surprisingly the Çandarlı are not even mentioned. However, Wittek devoted a lengthy passage to them in the second, a less known article in French published around the same time. It is worth quoting from this in detail:

We shall later see further proof that the representatives of the ghâzî and Muslim tendencies found themselves set one against another in more or less open opposition. [...] The cooperation of the two tendencies was not guaranteed by any superimposed institution, but was achieved rather by the personal cooperation of their representatives. Thus we see Murâd I, at the end of his reign, putting both [the marcher lord] Evrenos Bey and the theologian vizier Khaireddîn Pasha in charge of the conquest of Macedonia. This vizier, Khaireddîn Çandarlı, is the ancestor of a family for whom the position of vizier was hereditary throughout our period of study. Their place at the head of the administration brought the Çandarlı great wealth. Their economic interests led them to Byzantine

9 Anonymous, ed. Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*; Taeschner and Wittek, "Die Vezirfamilie der Çandarlyzâde".

10 Taeschner and Wittek, "Die Vezirfamilie der Çandarlyzâde", 69, 79.

11 Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*; Wittek, 'De la défaite d'Ankara'. Both pieces originated as public lectures: the first in London, the second in Paris. They were recently republished in English along with other material and an introduction by Colin Heywood (Wittek, ed. Heywood, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*). This book makes it possible to follow the evolution of Wittek's thought over time.

Constantinople—still the commercial centre for the whole of the Levant. [...] The Çandarlı were the Ottoman state's first 'ministers of foreign affairs'. [...] 'Alî Pasha and İbrâhîm Pasha, Khaireddîn's sons, are presented in the sources as prudent counsellors who endeavoured to lead Bâyezîd [I, 1389–1402] toward a policy of caution and moderation. But it would not be until the next generation that these early Ottoman diplomats would acquire enough experience to serve the state with a foreign policy that was no longer exclusively based on force[...]

As regards domestic policy, the Çandarlıs' position was determined by the fact that they belonged to the class of the 'ulemâ: they are explicitly described as such in the sources. This, and their wealth, and their relations with the foreign world, suffice to explain why the chroniclers, ghâzî spokesmen in the main, are not very favourable towards them.¹²

The above discussion is striking both for its emphasis on the Çandarlı's influence in diplomacy and foreign affairs, and for its superficial treatment of their role in matters of internal administration. To the extent that this role is mentioned at all, it is reduced to the fact that the Çandarlı were members of the *ulema*. We might expect as much, for such a perspective is perfectly in keeping with Wittek's theory of a dichotomy between the raiders and religious classes in the early Ottoman polity.

For Wittek's successors, however, it was precisely the Çandarlı family's role in internal reforms that was most worthy of attention. Writing at a time when the *Annales* school of historiography was highly influential in Ottoman studies, Halil İnalçık drew attention primarily to internal social dynamics, specifically the conflict between centralizing and centrifugal elements in the early Ottoman polity.¹³ İnalçık and others following in Wittek's footsteps understood that it was impossible to accept at face value his simple division between frontiersmen and *ulema*. For them, the negative presentation of the Çandarlı was to be understood as a reaction of pre-existing elites (*ğâzî* or otherwise) against progressive Ottoman centralization and institutionalization. According to this theory, after the Çandarlı and other learned outsiders introduced such institutions as Islamic courts, taxation, and bookkeeping, they were blamed for corrupting a supposedly 'pure' social order embodied by frontiersmen and sufi

12 Wittek, 'De la défaite d'Ankara', 12–13; English translation in Wittek, ed. Heywood, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*, 144–145.

13 For the period in question, see İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire*, 10–14, 65; İnalçık, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest". For the broader emphasis on social history in Ottoman studies, see İnalçık, *An Economic and Social History*; İnalçık, "Impact of the Annales School"; İnalçık, "Centralization and Decentralization"; Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats*.

mystics (the various dervish *şeyhs* and *babas*). When the central state and its institutions became firmly established under Mehmed II, the previous elites found themselves dispossessed, and took out their frustration by writing their own version of Ottoman history. The Çandarlı became its villains. They were an easy target, since they were no longer in favor after 1453.

2 Çandarlı Kara Halil and the early Ottoman state

Whatever the merits of such a view, there can be little doubt that in order to properly address the question, it is necessary to consider in more detail the careers of individual members of the Çandarlı family. The following is a brief survey of what is known of the dynasty's founder, Çandarlı Kara Halil. It should be stated outright that the state of our knowledge on the entire family consists of a small book by İ.H. Uzunçarşılı, which is in fact little more than an extended encyclopedia article.¹⁴ There are no other biographies or individual studies, despite the fact that three of the Çandarlı viziers were among the most important statesmen in Islamic history. In fact, even basic facts about the family are still unclear or completely unknown. For example, although it seems obvious that the Çandarlı derived their name from their place of origin, this place is far from easy to trace. The most likely candidate is a small town in the district of Sivrihisar.¹⁵ This was presumably the original home of the family's founding father, a man called Halil or Kara Halil, who became known as Hayreddin Paşa after he became vizier around 1365. Little is known about his background, scholarly or otherwise, apart from the fact that he came into Ottoman territory from further east. While Uzunçarşılı speculates about his education, he also admits that there is little to go on before Kara Halil's appointment as *qadi*.¹⁶ Although Halil was supposedly a member of the *ulema*, this needs to be qualified; in fact, he appears to have been educated not in the *madrassa*, but rather in sufi circles. He was apparently a disciple of a certain Şeyh Fahreddin, and may have been connected to Şeyh Edebali, the holy man whose daughter the first Ottoman ruler Osman Gazi allegedly married.¹⁷

Although the few available sources present Kara Halil as a recent arrival from further east, apparently his career under the Ottomans had begun as early

14 Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*. The author is himself a descendant of the family in question, as is clear from the genealogical appendix.

15 Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, 1–2.

16 Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, 3.

17 Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, 3–5.

as the reign of the dynasty's founder, Osman Gazi (d. 1324?) By the standards of the time, he was sufficiently educated to qualify as an Islamic judge, for under Osman he became *qadi* of Bilecik, a small western Anatolian city that was an important Ottoman center. During the reign of Osman's successor Orhan (d. 1362), he was promoted to the post of *qadi* of İznik (Nicaea), a major former Byzantine town which had fallen to the Ottomans in 1331. A few years later, he was made *qadi* of Bursa, the recently conquered Ottoman capital. But this last promotion was not immediate, only taking place in 1348, when the previous incumbent left the post to become vizier.¹⁸ At this time in Ottoman history, the vizierate was still a post of a purely consultative and administrative nature, rather than one with a military dimension. This might help explain why it was given to a man of learning rather than a general. As for the qadiship of Bursa, in 1348 it was the top position in the Ottoman learned hierarchy. But this would change around 1362, when the post of *qāḍī-ʿaskar* (head military judge) was created for Kara Halil.¹⁹ Eventually, he would attain the vizierate, probably ca. 1365, during the reign of Murad I (r. 1362–89). Kara Halil Çandarlı is considered the first grand vizier, because in his person the roles of vizier and general (*beylerbeyi*) were combined for the first time.

Based on the above, it is possible to say that the career of Kara Halil closely followed the evolution of the Ottoman polity, from a minor principality to the main power-broker in Anatolia and the Balkans. The creation of new posts can be explained by the practical necessities of territorial expansion, but also in more political and international terms, as the result of an Ottoman need to compete for prestige with other local and regional powers. For example, it is probably no coincidence that the newly created Ottoman post of *qāḍī-ʿaskar* already existed among the Mamluks. As they became the main power in Anatolia, the Ottomans began to compete with this major rival on their southern border, an established state that enjoyed the prestigious title of guardian of the holy shrines of Mecca and Medina (*khādim al-ḥaramayn*).²⁰ All of this goes some way toward explaining how the Çandarlı family came to be so dominant in Ottoman administration. For it seems that already in the person of its founder Kara Halil, the family was making itself indispensable to the Ottoman rulers through a combination of scholarly, administrative, diplomatic, and even military skills. These roles were eventually separated, once the Ottoman ruling apparatus had reached a more structured and specialized state of development. After the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, following a trend that had begun already under Mehmed I and Murad II, slaves of the Porte (*kul*)

18 Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, 6. This man was Kayserili Sinaneddin Yusuf.

19 Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, 6–7.

20 Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, 7.

came to dominate Ottoman administration, and it was no longer considered appropriate to appoint viziers from among the *ulema*.²¹

After these observations, we may return to the career of Kara Halil Çandarlı and his descendants. It is worth noting that after assuming the post of grand vizier, Kara Halil changed his name to the more Islamic Hayreddin (*Hayr al-Dīn*). In his foundation documents and building inscriptions, he appears with the even loftier name *Hayr al-Mille ve 'd-Dīn*. In fact, such practices follow parallel developments in the titulature of Ottoman sultans.²² As for Kara Halil's military role, its importance has been known since the early work of Taeschner and Wittek.²³ He was one of the protagonists of the conquest of Rumelia, the all-important European part of the Ottoman conquests, where he worked alongside the great marcher lord Hacı Evrenos on the east-west axis of the ancient Via Egnatia. There is little doubt that the new Ottoman conquests held a central place in Halil's career. According to Uzunçarşılı, Halil was made vizier in Gallipoli, at a time when Murad I was leaving Rumelia to pursue other activities in Anatolia following the conquest of Adrianople (Edirne). That would explain why one of the three mosques built by Kara Halil was in Gallipoli. The other two were in İznik and Serres (Siroz), towns that also marked significant stages in his career.²⁴

To sum up, Kara Halil performed crucial services for the early Ottoman rulers, services that ranged from the judicial to the administrative, from the diplomatic to the military. He built major infrastructure in the form of mosques, and was one of the key protagonists of the conquest of new Ottoman territory in the southern Balkans. For his image in the *Anonymous Chronicles*, however, what is most crucial is his role in initiating administrative and military reform. Among the institutions for which he is credited (or more accurately, blamed) are the famous janissary corps and the *yaya*, a Turcoman infantry corps attached to the janissaries. Moreover, if we are to trust the *Anonymous Chronicles*, he was also behind the creation of a central treasury and taxation making

21 İnalçık, *An Economic and Social History*, 13. It is worth noting that Mehmed I's grand vizier Bayezid Paşa, the key figure behind his administration, was probably also a slave of the Porte. See Kastritsis, "Bayezid Paşa".

22 In the Ottoman ruler Orhan's endowment deed dated 1324, both Orhan and his father Osman are mentioned with similar Islamic epithets. See Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 61, 168 n. 4.

23 Taeschner and Wittek, "Die Vezirfamilie der Çandarlyzâde", 71–76.

24 The mosque in Gallipoli does not survive. For the one in İznik, see Ayverdi, *Osmanlı Mîmârîsinin İlk Devri*, 309–319. For the one in Serres, which was destroyed in the fire of 1913, see Balta, "Les vakıfs de Serrès", 91–93. See also Taeschner and Wittek, "Die Vezirfamilie der Çandarlyzâde", 62–65, 77–78.

use of account books (*defter*). In short, he was responsible for Ottoman central administration as we know it.

3 The Image of the Çandarlı in the *Anonymous Chronicles* and Ahmedi

We have already considered in brief how the Çandarlı are presented in the *Anonymous Chronicles*, and how certain institutions of the central state, such as the treasury, are attributed to their negative influence and that of other scholars (*ulema*). After Kafadar's general summary, which provides the main outlines, it is now time to take a more detailed look at some of these passages. The following is a close translation of one of the better-known extracts:

At that time [the reign of Murād I (1362–89)], tax [*ḥarāc*] was low. Things were such that even the infidels were not oppressed. They didn't take away their clothes and oxen, or their son and daughter, by making them sell them or give them as security [to pay their taxes]. At that time, the rulers [*pādişāhlar*] were not greedy; whatever came into their hands they gave away again, and they didn't know what a treasury was. But as soon as Hayreddin Paşa came to the gate of government, greedy scholars [*dānişmend*] became the companions of the rulers, and they gave up piety [*taḳvā*] in favor of the legal opinion [*fetvā*]. They said: "A treasury is a necessity for him who would call himself ruler". At that time, they turned the rulers to their side. It is said: "Greed and oppression have made their appearance. Naturally, where there is greed there will be oppression". Right now, it has become excessive. Whatever oppression and malice there is in these lands, it comes from the scholars. They are its cause. They realized that if they made use of their knowledge [*ilm*] then the entire population would submit to them.²⁵

The anonymous source continues in the same vein, recounting a dialogue with a sufi holy man (*baba*) who blames corruption on members of the *ulema*. He goes on to point out how such corruption has increased in his own time (i.e. the late fifteenth century). Then comes the following passage:

25 Anonymous, ed. Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, 25. My translation of this passage is a more literal version of that in Lewis, *Islam*, 135–136.

In the times of Osmān, Orkhān Gāzī, and Murād, wine was not drunk. At that time there were ulema who made their words effective. At that time the Sultans were ashamed before the ulema and did not depart from whatever words they uttered. If in the house of Osmān any sin or injustice arose, they stopped it. Had they not stopped it, the ulema of that time would have left them, and none would have come to such a Pādishāh. The ulema of that time were not sinners like the ulema of today. They were men of standing who came to the gate of the Pādishāh... At that time, to fill the office of qāḏī, they used to seek a scholar from among the professors. A qadiship might remain vacant for a long time, and when a suitable scholar was found, he was not happy to accept appointment as qāḏī.²⁶

From the above lines, it becomes clear that there are serious problems with Wittek's stark distinction between frontiersmen and *ulema*. For here it is clear that what is at stake is not the value of the scholarly class *per se*, but the character of particular individuals belonging to it. Moreover, it is difficult to see in what way the discourse of decline in the above passages differs from that in the late sixteenth century Ottoman Empire, to say nothing of other times and places.²⁷

So if not all *ulema* are to be blamed for the alleged corruption and decline of Ottoman society, whom in particular do the chronicles consider responsible for these problems? Once again, blame is placed squarely on the shoulders of Çandarlı Kara Halil. But he is not alone. Another scholar is also mentioned, who like Halil comes from the lands to the Ottomans' immediate east:

When the Persians and the Karamanlis became the companions of the princes of the house of Osmān, these princes committed all kinds of sins. Çandarlı Kara Halil and the Karamanian Turk Rüstem were both at the time considered as great and learned. When these two came to the Ottoman princes, they filled the world with all kinds of cunning tricks. Until then nothing was known of keeping account books. When they came to the Ottoman princes, they compiled account books. The practice of accumulating money and storing it in a treasury comes from them. They

26 Anonymous, ed. Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, 29–30; trans. Lewis, *Islam*, 138.

27 On the Ottoman decline discourse, see Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 201–213; Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline"; Darling, *A History of Social Justice*, 139–148.

had no thought of the end and did not remember that they would have to leave it all behind them, but were very proud of themselves.²⁸

Apart from the above passage, nothing is known about “the Karamanian Turk Rüstem”. However, his name suggests that he must have come from the principality of Karaman, the main Anatolian rival of the Ottomans into the late fifteenth century. We may also note here another key element of the chronicle’s discourse: the idea that Kara Halil Çandarlı and Rüstem of Karaman were “both at the time considered as great and learned”. If we consider this alongside other passages about ignorant *qadis* who cannot read and write, it is not difficult to see that contrary to Wittke’s distinction between learned scholars and rustic raiders, what is really at stake here is the scholarly pedigree of the Çandarlı and their associates.²⁹

The question of the scholarly qualifications of the Çandarlı and other influential early Ottoman scholars is a fruitful line of inquiry, which leads to another key source. This is the epic account of Ottoman history contained in Ahmedi’s *İskendernâme*, a text generally thought of as the earliest extant, datable account of Ottoman history.³⁰ In its final form, Ahmedi’s *İskendernâme* dates from around 1410, and it has long been known that the section on Ottoman history is based on a lost prose chronicle.³¹ As a whole, the work is altogether more complex, and is best described as a long, didactic philosophical poem in which history holds a prominent place for its value in demonstrating the vanity of the pursuit of power without justice. Ahmedi’s account of the Ottomans was written in the aftermath of their defeat by Timur in 1402 and contrasts their justice, piety, and zeal in the pursuit of religiously motivated warfare with the oppression of the Mongols who came before them. There is little doubt that descriptions of Mongol injustice are meant to evoke Timur; the work also contains references to the Byzantine-Ottoman conflict and other contemporary historical events.³²

28 Anonymous, ed. Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, 30; trans. Lewis, *Islam*, 139.

29 For the passages about scholars in the time of Bayezid I and “in our own time” (i.e. the late fifteenth century CE) see Anonymous, ed. Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, 29–32; Lewis, *Islam*, 138–141.

30 For a recent critical edition and translation of the Ottoman section, see Aḥmedi, ed. Sılay, *History of the Kings*. For the entire work, the standard edition is Aḥmedi, ed. Ünver, *İskender-nâme*. This is in fact a facsimile of a single manuscript with an introduction and table of contents.

31 İnalçık, “The Rise of Ottoman Historiography”, 159–161.

32 For an analysis of this and other historical references in Ahmedi’s *İskendernâme*, see Kastritsis, “The Alexander Romance”.

The fact that Ahmedi refers to several Ottoman rulers as holy raiders (*ğāzīs*) made his work ideal evidence for Wittek, who based his theory of the rise of the Ottoman Empire largely upon it. But there are many other aspects of the historical poem that have failed to attract the same attention. These include the following description of Çandarlı Kara Halil-Hayreddin:

When the Holy Raider Murād took his place (on the throne),
holy war and holy raid were his desire.

...

Whoever came to him, whether poor or stranger,
would obtain a great share of his good fortune.

...

Leaving Çender on account of his poverty,
Ḥalil-i Çenderī appeared before him.

Despite the fact that his knowledge was little.

That in every grace, he was lacking and untoward,
[Murād] was understanding of his exile, sad condition, and poverty,
So graciously, he appointed him to high office.

In the end, he appointed him vizier over the dominion.

What vizierate? For he became a great prince.³³

What are we to make of this description? First of all, it is worth noting that Ahmedi, possibly following his lost source, does not present an accurate account of Halil's background and career under the Ottomans. For while it is true that Kara Halil's rise to prominence coincided mostly with the reign of Murad I, who appointed him grand vizier, there is little to suggest that he was destitute before that time. Instead, Ahmedi's verses should be taken as a veiled critique of Halil's political influence, which the poet (or his lost source) seems to have considered out of proportion with his education. In other words, according to the poet, Halil's poverty was intellectual. Uzunçarşılı attributes this negative presentation to the fact that Ahmedi's own education was of a higher level, since he had studied in Cairo.³⁴ However, as we have seen, this view is also consistent with his presentation in the *Anonymous Chronicles*, a source not generally known for its intellectual elitism. Should this common ground be

33 My translation is a more literal version of that in Aḥmedi, ed. Silay, *History of the Kings*, 11. In the Ünver edition (Aḥmedi, *İskendernāme*) this passage corresponds to verses 7672–7682. However, not all verses are present in Ünver's manuscript. For the full text based on several manuscripts, see Aḥmedi, ed. Silay, *History of the Kings*, 35–36 (verses 136–146).

34 Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, 18.

taken as a sign that Halil was indeed poorly educated? Not necessarily. But at the very least, we must accept that the question of scholarly qualifications and different educational backgrounds was one that was already being asked in early Ottoman society. This argument was apparently being used against the Çandarlı at the turn of the fifteenth century, if not earlier, by a court poet, whose sources (like those of the *Anonymous Chronicles*) were even older.

As indicated already, it is inadequate to speak of the Çandarlı family and its founder only in general terms. More detail is required if we are to approach the problem in its proper historical context. A brief account of key events will suffice for our purposes here. As we have seen, Ahmedi was writing around 1410, at a time when Ottoman society was struggling with the aftermath of a crushing defeat. In July of 1402, the first Ottoman attempt at empire had come to a sudden end on a battlefield near Ankara. When Timur withdrew from Anatolia the following spring, he left a territory devastated by the depredations of his nomadic army. The political landscape was highly fragmented, since Timur had reinstated as his clients several former *beylik* rulers, while also leaving Bayezid I's sons to fight for what was left of the Ottoman domains. This resulted in a period of civil war, during most of which the main contender for the Ottoman throne was Ahmedi's patron, Emir Süleyman (d. 1411). Süleyman's success was largely due to the fact that he had on his side a great part of the Ottoman ruling establishment. At the head of his administration was Kara Halil's son and successor to the office of grand vizier, Çandarlı Ali Paşa. However, when Süleyman attempted to extend his power from the European side of the Ottoman domains to Anatolia, he faced a serious adversary in the person of his brother Mehmed (the future Mehmed I, r. 1413–21). This forced Süleyman to spend much of his reign in Anatolia, in an effort to expand and defend his power against Mehmed and other enemies.³⁵

Such a policy was only possible thanks to the conclusion of a treaty with the Christian powers of the Balkans, which had involved territorial and other concessions. Çandarlı Ali Paşa played an important role in the peace negotiations leading to this treaty. However, he died in 1406, after Süleyman moved his base of operations to Anatolia. In the meantime, it seems that the marcher lords of Rumelia and other elements of Ottoman society based in Europe were becoming increasingly displeased with the treaty, because it hindered their raiding activity against Byzantium and other Christian lands. Their resentment eventually led to Süleyman's demise: various powers threatened by his rule (most notably his brother Mehmed) conspired to introduce yet another contender to

35 For a full account of the Ottoman civil war, see Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*.

the Ottoman throne. Presented with an alternative in the form of the young prince Musa, key members of Süleyman's administration deserted to Musa and assisted him in taking his brother's place. But in fact, after a mere two years, these same magnates began to desert Musa for Mehmed, who was thus able to take his brother's throne and reunify the Ottoman domains. One of the key deserters was another member of the Çandarlı family, Ali's brother İbrahim, the father of Murad II and Mehmed II's vizier Çandarlı Halil Paşa, who was executed in 1453.

What bearing does all this have on Ahmedî's early fifteenth-century representation of Çandarlı Kara Halil? In fact, the above context is crucial to understanding his negative image, as well as that of the family as a whole. For regardless of when Ahmedî wrote the rest of his *İskendernâme* (and it is generally accepted that there were several drafts spanning decades), the section on Ottoman history was the last to be completed. In the aftermath of the 1402 debacle, and in light of the civil war pitting Süleyman against his brothers, it was essential to present the Ottomans as holy raiders conquering Christian land in the name of Islam. For that reason, Ahmedî criticizes Bayezid I's attacks against other Muslims. However, it was known to all that Süleyman had concluded a peace treaty with Byzantium and other Christian powers, which had been largely negotiated by Kara Halil's son Çandarlı Ali Paşa. His death in 1406, along with the rising threat of Süleyman's other magnates deserting to Musa, made it all the more important for Süleyman to distance himself from the Çandarlı and their past policies. It is in the context of this profound political crisis that we must interpret Ahmedî's verses. For after Ali Paşa's death in 1406, the Çandarlı were an easy target, just as they would be again after the execution of his nephew Halil in 1453. It seems Ahmedî was more than happy to oblige, since from his own perspective, the scholarly pedigree of the Çandarlı may already have been in question.

Some further evidence adds weight to this interpretation. For despite its unquestionable importance, the historical section of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* is neither the only account of Ottoman history produced in the early part of the fifteenth century, nor the only one from that time to cast the Çandarlı viziers in a negative light. Ahmedî's verses must be considered alongside the anonymous *Aḥvāl-i Sulṭān Meḥemmed* ('Tales of Sultan Mehmed').

4 The *Aḥvāl-i Sulṭān Meḥemmed* and the Çandarlı

The *Aḥvāl-i Sulṭān Meḥemmed* (hereafter *Aḥval*) is an epic account in prose completed during the reign of Mehmed I (1413–21), which has survived

incorporated into two later chronicles.³⁶ This text was apparently composed in the court of Mehmed I in order to aid him in his struggles against his brothers, and eventually justify his violent rise to the throne. While it is impossible to be certain of its date of composition, its contents and structure suggest that it was written gradually as events were taking place, probably receiving its final form between 1413 and 1416. It is a lively work of epic prose, whose representation of its hero, Sultan Mehmed I, is reminiscent of the Persian epic *Book of Kings* (Firdawsī's *Shahnāma*). The work has only one true hero, the conquering sultan, but several villains including the grand vizier Çandarlı Ali Paşa. As we have seen, Ali was a suitable target because he was serving Mehmed's brother and rival, Emir Süleyman. His role in the narrative is therefore connected to Süleyman's activity in Anatolia, where he and Mehmed competed for the Ottoman territory that remained after Timur's departure. It is worth taking a detailed look at the presentation of Ali Paşa in the *Aḥvāl*. For as we will see, this shares some common elements with his more explicit vilification in the *Anonymous Chronicles*.

In the *Aḥvāl*, there are two key occasions on which Ali Paşa commits treachery against Mehmed. Each involves military confrontation between the Ottoman prince and his brother Süleyman, in which Mehmed would have gained the upper hand were it not for the deception of Ali Paşa. On the first of these, Ankara is under siege by Süleyman's far superior army. Afraid of falling into his brother's hands, Mehmed abandons the city and returns to his own base in the province of Rum (here defined as the region around Amasya and Tokat). He leaves the defense of Ankara in the hands of its governor, a man named Yakub Bey whose family played a prominent role in early Ottoman history.³⁷ However, its inhabitants open the gates to Süleyman, and Yakub has no choice but to take refuge in the citadel. Eventually he becomes desperate and sends messengers to Mehmed requesting assistance. When they reach Mehmed, he instructs his chancery to compose a letter of reply to Yakub, informing him that he is prepared to come to his assistance if he can only hold out a few more days. His reply is sent back with the messengers who had brought the original letter. However, on their way back they are captured by Süleyman's forces. As a result,

36 On this work and its significance, see Kastritsis, "The Historical Epic"; Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 28–33, 206–216. For a full English translation, see Kastritsis, *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed*. I published an improved, annotated translation based on the most important manuscript in Anonymous, *An Early Ottoman History: The Oxford Anonymous Chronicle* (pp. 97–151).

37 His father had also been governor, and he was an ancestor of Tursun Bey, the chronicler of Mehmed the Conqueror. See Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 115.

Yakub's letter to Mehmed ends up in the hands of Ali Paşa, who replaces it with a forgery. Here is how the *Aḥvāl* presents this key moment in the narrative:

Bulgur Ağa took the letter and set out to deliver it, but was captured along the way. He was brought to Ali Paşa, who questioned him and was able to obtain full knowledge of the letter's contents. [Ali] perpetrated a kind of deception, retaining the sultan's letter and replacing it with one written by himself. This was addressed to Yakub Bey as if from the sultan's mouth, and was sent back [with the same messenger]. It read, 'Yakub Bey! Now you have sent a letter informing me of the citadel's situation. This being the case, do not request assistance from me, for I am unable to reach you there. You have done well to make such a valiant effort to defend the citadel in my name. However, since matters have taken such a turn, you are to cease all fighting and surrender the castle to my older brother'. Perpetrating such a deception, Ali Paşa sent the letter to Yakub Bey. By the time it reached him, he had become most desperate. What could he do? Acting out of ignorance, he opened the gate and came out, kissed Emir Süleyman's hand, and surrendered the citadel to him.³⁸

What is most striking about this extract is that the negative presentation of Ali Paşa, while certainly present, is much less explicit than in the relevant passages of the *Anonymous Chronicles*. This makes sense, since the later passages also reflect the perspective of a time when the Çandarlı family had been disgraced following the conquest of Constantinople. When the above passage from the *Aḥvāl* was written (ca. 1413), the family was still influential. It is true that Ali Paşa was an enemy of the *Aḥvāl*'s protagonist and patron, Mehmed I, because he had served his brother and rival. However, around 1411, Ali Paşa's brother İbrahim actually joined Mehmed's court.³⁹ But in fact, there is a good chance that the passage we have just seen was written between 1406 and 1411, when there were as yet no members of the family on Mehmed's side.

In any case, what is of greatest interest here is not the negative presentation *per se*, but the form that it takes. We can gain further insight into the nature of the critique by examining another passage. This comes later in the narrative, but still in the context of Mehmed and Süleyman's power struggle in Anatolia. After losing Ankara to his brother, Mehmed withdraws to his base in Amasya-Tokat. But he does not give up, and is always looking for an opportunity to

38 Oxford Anonymous (Bodleian Marsh 313), 81v–82r. My updated translation. See also Kastritsis, *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed*, 25–26, 70–71 (original text).

39 Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 165–166.

confront Süleyman and regain the upper hand. While he is feasting with the people of his court, a messenger enters with the following message:

O Shah of the World! Some time ago you had sent your servant to Bursa. I went there and carried out a complete investigation. Your brother is practically alone, having only six hundred men by his side. He is occupied with drinking day and night, to such an extent that when he enters the bath to drink wine, he spends an entire month there feasting and enjoying himself. Such an opportunity presents itself but rarely. If you wish to attack, this is a most opportune moment.⁴⁰

The story is a lengthy one, but may be summarized as follows. Mehmed becomes excited at the opportunity presented to confront his brother Süleyman. Seizing the day, he sets out with his army in the direction of Bursa. He eventually reaches the Sakarya river, where he encounters one of Süleyman's officials, who has come to carry out a tax survey of the province.⁴¹ The official asks Mehmed's men who they are; they reply, "You'll see who we are!" and chase him away. He hastens back to Süleyman, who is thus informed of Mehmed's imminent arrival. Süleyman panics, throws down his wine goblet, and declares that the only course of action is to escape to the safety of Rumelia, on the European side of the straits. But Ali Paşa reassures him by suggesting a different plan. He reminds him that since he is in possession of the land, it is possible to hold out until Mehmed is forced to leave. He suggests an inaccessible place near Yenişehir, adding that if Mehmed is somehow able to gain the upper hand, Ali will write a letter convincing him to depart without delay. Events play out exactly as predicted. Mehmed and his army persevere, despite difficult terrain and inclement weather, and Ali Paşa resorts once again to his epistolary skills and his talent for deceit. He writes a letter to Mehmed, informing him of treason in his ranks. Mehmed does not believe the letter and continues to fight, but the seeds of doubt have been sowed in his mind. When one of Mehmed's cup-bearers deserts to the enemy (perhaps unable to resist the temptation of employment at Süleyman's court), Mehmed takes the event as a sign that Ali Paşa was right. He abandons the struggle, and Süleyman's throne is saved.⁴²

In the above story, we may discern several key elements. These include Mehmed's bravery; Süleyman's cowardice and love of luxury; and finally,

40 Oxford Anonymous, 82v–83r; Kastritis, *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed*, 26, 71.

41 *il yazmağa... gelmişdi*. Oxford Anonymous, 83r; Kastritis, *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed*, 26, 72.

42 Oxford Anonymous, 83r–85r; Kastritis, *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed*, 27–28, 72–73.

Çandarlı Ali Paşa's cunning and reliance on the written word. The mention of a land survey is especially intriguing, as it would probably have had special connotations for the *Aḥvāl's* audience. Like other elements in the narrative, such references to Ottoman bureaucratic practices for which as we have seen the Çandarlı were held responsible may be regarded as a precursor to the much more explicit critique of the *Anonymous Chronicles*. However, as we saw in Kafadar's survey, another key discursive element in the *Chronicles* concerns the practice of courtly drinking parties. This, too, is present in the *Aḥvāl*, as well as in several other sources from the early fifteenth century. Specifically, what is critiqued in these narratives is the prince Süleyman's love of wine and courtly entertainment. This constitutes another element deserving our attention, for it is directly related to the discourse about the Çandarlı and centralization. It is to this point that we will now turn.

5 Courtly Wine-drinking: *topos* or Reality?

If there is any doubt that stories about Süleyman's drinking were circulating around the time of his death in 1411, this may be easily dispelled by the following laconic entry in a Byzantine short chronicle:

As Emir Sülman had taken to bathing and was drinking one glass after another, the lords and grandees got fed up, and the armies left and began to desert to Musa Bey. When Emir Sülman heard this, he was afraid and tried to escape. But he was caught in the area of Bryse and strangled, on February 17 which was a Tuesday.⁴³

We have seen that in the *Anonymous Chronicles*, a literary tradition that in its present form dates to the end of the fifteenth century, the *topos* of royal drinking appears as one of many negative elements, alongside the corruption of the Çandarlı viziers and other members of the scholarly classes. The fact that many of these elements are already present in the early part of that century, many years before the centralizing reforms of Mehmed II, demands an explanation. If such stories were indeed a reaction against increased royal power and centralization, this reaction was already present in the aftermath of 1402, when the first Ottoman attempt at empire collapsed and those opposed to it must have felt vindicated. In the ensuing dynastic war, first Mehmed and then Musa took

43 Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, vol. 1, 637. My translation. For further commentary on this passage, see Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 154–155.

advantage of the fact that their successful older brother Süleyman had come to be associated with their late father Bayezid's defeated regime, with its supposed emphasis on court culture and centralization.

Süleyman's association with Bayezid's regime seems to have had several aspects. As we have seen, one of these was that he was served by Çandarlı Ali Paşa and other key members of Bayezid's administration. Another was his close relationship with the Christian elites of Rumelia and the Aegean region. It is true that this relationship was essentially different, since Bayezid was able to follow an aggressive policy toward the Christian world, whereas Süleyman was forced to surrender important Ottoman possessions to Byzantium and other powers in exchange for peace. Such important policy differences notwithstanding, however, the fact remains that both had extensive dealings with Christians. It was precisely in this area that the Çandarlı family's role appears to have been indispensable. We have already seen that the last important member of the family, Çandarlı Halil Paşa, was executed following the conquest of Constantinople, because he was seen as a collaborator with the infidel (*gāvur ortağı*). This characterization is generally thought to have stemmed from the fact that he was opposed to prolonging the siege of the city, favoring instead a more accommodating stance toward Byzantium. But in fact, these accusations appear to have had deeper roots.⁴⁴

To better elucidate the matter, we may now turn to another source, the late fifteenth-century chronicle of 'Āşıkpaşazāde:

Emir Süleyman sent an ambassador to Karamanoğlu and Germiyanoglu with the message, "Do not release my brother Musa, and I will be most friendly toward you". When Musa found out that his brother had made peace with Karamanoğlu, he escaped to İsfendiyar. Emir Süleyman was in Bursa. He heard that Musa had gone to İsfendiyar and marched on him until he reached Göynük, where he camped on the banks of a river. At that time it was summer. When winter came he wintered there, never leaving that location. It became known thereafter as "the bey's poplar", because Emir Süleyman was always conversing and making merry there under a poplar tree. Then Süleyman made peace with İsfendiyar, so he left that place and reached İznik. There he occupied himself once again

44 It is worth pointing out the parallels (and possible connections) between the Çandarlı before 1453 and the Notaras family in Byzantium at the same time. See Angold, *The Fall of Constantinople*, 8–9, 34–36; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins*, 214–218.

with merrymaking, drinking Ali Paşa's free wine. İsfendiyar put Musa in a ship at Sinop and sent him to Wallachia.⁴⁵

There is no need to dwell here in detail on the political events to which the passage refers. These were highly complex, and were related to the power struggle in Anatolia between the Ottoman princes Mehmed and Emir Süleyman, which drew in many neighboring powers, including the ruler of Sinop, the İsfendiyar mentioned in the text.⁴⁶ Suffice it to say, the key event that ended the stalemate between the two brothers was the Black Sea crossing of a third prince, their brother Musa. In reality, this was the outcome of a coordinated effort by Süleyman's many enemies to undermine his rule by invading his European territory from the north. Intriguingly, however, in some manuscripts of the *Anonymous Chronicles*, there is another version of the above passage, which places responsibility for this cunning scheme squarely on the shoulders of Ali Paşa:

In the end, [Süleyman] made peace with İsfendiyar. Then he left and went to İznik. There he occupied himself once again with merrymaking. Seeing that he never stayed away from wine, all the people were offended by his bad habit. With the intercession of Ali Paşa, İsfendiyar put Musa in a ship at Sinop and sent him to Wallachia.⁴⁷

It is worth digressing for a moment to consider this difference between 'Āşıkpaşazāde and this version of the *Anonymous Chronicles*. As is usually the case, the texts in question are based on a common source, so discrepancies may be due at least in part to textual transmission. Even if this is the case, this passage deserves our attention: for the idea that Ali Paşa could have been behind Musa's Black Sea crossing is absurd, and shows the extent of the Çandarlı's demonization. For Ali Paşa (d. 1406) was Süleyman's vizier, and was almost certainly dead at the time of Musa's Black Sea crossing.⁴⁸

Such inconsistencies would have been obvious to 'Āşıkpaşazāde, who had lived through some of the events in question. In his chronicle, as in the *Aḥvāl*, emphasis is placed instead on Süleyman's courtly drinking habits. But there is a salient detail here that deserves further scrutiny: this is the reference to "Ali Paşa's free wine" (*'Alī Paşa'nın müft şarābı*). As we saw earlier, in the *Anonymous*

45 'Āşıkpaşazāde, ed. Giese, *Tevārīḥ-i Āl-i 'Osmān*, 73.

46 On these events and alliances, see Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 129–134.

47 Anonymous, ed. Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, 48 (text), 132 (apparatus).

48 Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 135–136.

Chronicles as summarized by Kafadar it is a Serbian princess who is blamed for introducing wine drinking to the Ottoman court. This is said to have happened during the reign of Süleyman's father Bayezid, when the princess in question became his concubine following the Serbian defeat at Kosovo (1389). Needless to say, there is nothing striking about a Christian princess being blamed for introducing wine-drinking into a Muslim court. But the mention of Ali Paşa, and specifically the expression "free wine", is an intriguing element that needs to be explained.

In fact, such explanation comes from a surprising quarter: the expense accounts of the Genoese colony of Pera. There we may find the following brief entries:

1403, 26 June. Present made to his lordship Mosormano Jhalabi [i.e. Emir Süleyman Çelebi], who is dominant in Greece ... for which we are owed ... and it is for 8 jars, purchased from the same person to be filled with wine for them ... Likewise, 27 June ... for Malvasia wine ... Likewise, 8 July, to Francisco de Canicia. And it is for 4 jars, in which was placed wine to be given as a gift to Ali Paşa and Balaban, who are barons of the aforementioned Jhalabi [i.e. Süleyman] ... Likewise, 28 June ... for Malvasia, 1 *metron*, presented and gifted to a certain Turk, who is the brother of Ali Paşa ... *hyperpyra* 2, *keratia* 3 ... 1403, 27 July. Present made to his lordship the Emperor Calojani Paleologo [John VII], etc. ... for Malvasia ... 1403, 10 July. Present made to his lordship Balaban, lord of Greece and general, etc. ... for Malvasia wine, 2 *metra*, purchased from a certain tavern-keeper for the aforementioned lord Balaban.⁴⁹

One question that immediately arises concerns the identity of the man named Balaban. This name is common in early Ottoman history, and is associated with several early Ottoman magnates, so it is impossible to identify its bearer with complete certainty. However, one individual is by far the likeliest candidate: a protégé of Ali Paşa, one of three converts to Islam whose names appear as witnesses on the foundation document (*vakfiyye*, Ar. *waqfiyya*) of his foundation in Bursa. The document is dated 1405, as is another apparently issued by the same Balaban, which is preserved in a monastic archive.⁵⁰ If it is indeed the case that the Genoese accounts and the two Ottoman documents refer to the same person, then it makes sense to speak of someone belonging to Çandarlı

49 Iorga, *Notes et extraits (ROL)*, 86–88.

50 Kotzageorgis, "An Ottoman Document", 263. See also Uzunçarşılı, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, 45; Uzunçarşılı, "Çandarlı-zade Ali Paşa Vakfiyesi", 558, 562.

Ali's inner circle. In fact, there is a strong likelihood that Balaban was a manumitted Christian captive who had converted to Islam. Needless to say, this is all somewhat speculative; but the Genoese accounts leave little doubt that Balaban and Ali were close associates, and were involved in procuring gifts of wine for the Ottoman prince Süleyman.

It is also worth noting the mention of Ali Paşa's brother. There can be little doubt that the man in question is Çandarlı İbrahim, the father of the Halil Paşa executed in 1453. Although İbrahim played an important role in this period of Ottoman history, he has escaped the negative presentation accorded to his relatives in the chronicles. His more positive image appears to have been due to the twin facts that he was less powerful than his brother, and that he eventually ended up in Mehmed I's camp.⁵¹ The fact that his defection took place via Constantinople suggests that he shared his family's diplomatic links to the Byzantine capital and its Genoese sister settlement, as demonstrated also by his presence in the above expense accounts.

The mention of Ottoman dignitaries in the Genoese accounts is highly significant, for it sheds light on what appear in the Ottoman narratives to be little more than exaggerated stories designed to denigrate these people. It is striking to see some of them described in the Genoese records in similar terms as the Byzantine Emperor, notably as recipients of generous quantities of Malvasia wine. Of course, wine was not the only gift they received. Luxury textiles are also mentioned, as are expenses related to an elephant and some court jesters. But if anything, such gifts further confirm Süleyman's presentation in Ottoman sources as a lover of courtly luxuries. It is clear that at least part of the time, these goods were also procured by the Çandarlı family and their dependents; and not everyone would have been sympathetic to the idea that they were necessary trappings of an established Islamic ruler.

Finally, what should we make of the fact that Süleyman and his magnates seem indeed to have indulged in the consumption of wine? First of all, there is little doubt that this was far from uncommon in the Muslim courts of medieval Anatolia. In fact, devotees of the beverage apparently included even the great *ğāzī* leader Umur of Aydın.⁵² However, what seems to have been of key importance was the precise setting and mode of its consumption. In the anonymous *Aḥval*, following a common Persian convention, each chapter ends with the hero, Süleyman's brother Mehmed, holding banquets and drinking parties with his men. Such feasting conforms to an epic mode that evokes the kings

51 On İbrahim's defection to Mehmed, see Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 165–166.

52 For some examples of wine-drinking involving Muslim rulers of Anatolia, see Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade*, 74.

and other heroes of the *Shāhnāma*, and is therefore fundamentally different in nature from the same source's presentation of Süleyman. Mehmed's feasting is a suitable manly complement to hard-fought battles, which may be summarized with the common Persian expression *bazm u razm* ('banquet and battle'). In contrast, Süleyman's drinking takes place in the bath, while surrounded by poets and other courtiers, deaf to his generals' calls for military action. It is for this reason that he is ultimately unfit to occupy the throne.⁵³

6 Conclusion: Tales, Contexts, Histories

The above analysis allows us to arrive at several tentative conclusions. The first concerns the development over time of a coherent political discourse opposed to the creation of a strong Ottoman central state. We have seen that a kernel of that discourse was already present in the early fifteenth century, but had not yet developed into what we might call the classic formulation of the *Anonymous Chronicles*. By the late fifteenth century, when these chronicles were compiled, it was possible to blame the development of Ottoman society over more than a century on several generations of the Çandarlı family, together with other people and groups. By then, generalizations could be made about "men of knowledge" (*dānişmend*) as a social category, which could be blamed retrospectively for "whatever oppression and corruption there is in this land". It is precisely this discourse that was seized upon by Wittek and his followers, who read into it a neat distinction between *ğāzīs* and ulema. But in the early part of the fifteenth century, such social divisions were not yet as clear.

As we have seen, there can be little doubt that stories about Çandarlı Ali Paşa and his father, Kara Halil-Hayreddin, were already circulating in the years around 1402. This is hardly surprising, considering the strong role of the family in the first Ottoman attempt at empire under Bayezid I. It is undoubtedly the case that their close connection to power had created resentment, not least because the centralization and institutionalization with which they were involved had alienated social groups with vested interests. In this respect, the late fourteenth century CE was not unlike the late fifteenth, when Mehmed II made his unpopular centralizing reforms. But unlike Mehmed II's highly successful imperial venture, the failure of the first Ottoman attempt at empire was taken by some as proof that those behind it were misguided, even guilty of a

53 For the different accounts of Süleyman's loss of power, see Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 153–158. For the relevant section of the *Aḥvāl*, see Oxford Anonymous, 89v–91v; Kastritsis, *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed*, 31–32, 77–78.

direct offense against God. For the Timurid debacle of 1402 had created a situation in which it was easy to draw connections between several trends that had been on the rise in the preceding years. These included the introduction of taxation, slave soldiers, and other centralizing institutions; aggressive policies toward other Muslim states, which relied largely on the aforementioned slave soldiers as well as armies provided by Christian clients; a rise in diplomatic activity, often involving Christian powers, in which it was standard practice to exchange gifts of wine and other luxury goods to be consumed in a courtly setting; and the rise of the Ottoman court itself, which was now in a position to attract such important poets and intellectuals as Ahmedi.

These developments are closely mirrored in the careers of the first two Çandarlı viziers. After 1402, like other high-ranking members of Bayezid's administration, Ali Paşa had supported Bayezid's son Emir Süleyman. In the immediate aftermath of Timur's victory, Süleyman and his court were forced to abandon Anatolia, then make peace with Byzantium and other Christian powers in exchange for security. In so doing, they alienated various social groups, especially the raiders and others relying for their livelihood on aggression against the Christian world. Although many of the grievances that surfaced in 1402 seem to have had roots in the policies of Murad I and Bayezid I, neither of these rulers could be accused of taking a conciliatory stance toward Christendom. But after the Ottoman defeat, their heirs were in the unenviable position of trying to reunite what was left under the pressure of numerous threats, the greatest of which was another Timurid intervention. Although peace with the Christian world gave Süleyman and Ali Paşa an opportunity to turn their attention toward Anatolia, this came at an enormous cost. For just as Süleyman had a competent advisor in the person of Ali Paşa and a court panegyrist in the poet Ahmedi, his brother and rival Mehmed had his own advisor, his very competent tutor Bayezid Paşa, and literati of his own.⁵⁴ Probably under the direction of Bayezid Paşa, Mehmed's court was able to exploit popular discontent and the culture of epic poetry and storytelling in the service of his political agenda. For how else to explain the fact that rumors of events such as Ali Paşa's diplomatic exploits and Emir Süleyman's courtly wine-drinking found their way into the anonymous *Ahval*, in addition to other historical narratives?

The most important lesson to be learned is that when considering social divisions in early Ottoman society as represented in literary sources, it is not enough to think in terms of such simple categories as frontiersmen versus *ulema*, or even centralization and its discontents. It is also necessary to consider the role of rumors, propaganda, and the popularity of epic storytelling in

54 On this man, see Kastritsis, "Bäyezid Pasha".

the period in question. For how could stories we have come to associate with a coherent Ottoman discourse against centralization also appear in “official” propaganda narratives from an Ottoman court, as well as Christian sources? Crucially, this is not simply a matter of accepting that the stories in question must therefore be true. While they may indeed have been based on true events, they were also circulating as rumors that could cross the boundaries of language. Such stories had a life of their own, but could also be manipulated for political purposes. In light of the above considerations, it is not unreasonable to suggest that what might appear by the late fifteenth century to be the voice of the *gāzīs* opposed to Mehmed II’s centralization reforms can be traced at least in part to the court of his grandfather and namesake, Mehmed I.

Perhaps the best illustration of the importance of context and storytelling is the following passage from the Greek chronicle of Chalkokondyles (ca. 1460s). Like many of the Ottoman ones we have considered, its protagonist is Çandarlı Kara Halil/Hayreddin:

Hayreddin took over Thessalonike and enslaved the rebels. He was held in high esteem by Murad, although previously too he had risen high in his service and wielded great power. Many worthwhile stories are told about Hayreddin, about how he would advise Murad on what needed to be done and accomplished great deeds in both Asia and Europe while serving him in most matters. Some of his sayings to Murad in discussions of judgment and strategy are recorded. It is thus said that he once asked, “O Sultan Murad, how should one best conduct a campaign so as to most easily accomplish one’s goals?” It is reported that Murad answered, “By planning well and treating the soldiers as well as possible”. Hayreddin asked again, “And how do you plan properly?” He said, “If you use the right calculations and do not make mistakes in them”. At this point it is said that Hayreddin laughed loudly and said to him, “O Sultan Murad, you might seem to be most wise. But how could one make these calculations without being present to actually observe both what needs to be done and its opposite, and thereby avoid the latter while choosing to pursue the former, and so achieve what is necessary?” In this way he hinted that it was speed that accomplished great deeds, more so than other good qualities, and that there is nothing that a general should practice more than speed and swift application, and that he should be everywhere that he has to be. Conversing about such matters with each other, they showed that they did not lack judgment about what was required.⁵⁵

55 Chalkokondyles, trans. Kaldellis, *The Histories*, vol. 1, 76–79.

In certain respects, this story bears a remarkable resemblance to some of those in the *Anonymous Chronicles*. Without its original context, however, it ultimately makes little sense. As pointed out by the passage's translator, Anthony Kaldellis, this is one of many cases where Chalkokondyles is relying on Ottoman sources, which were probably communicated orally.⁵⁶ Indeed, the chronicler states as much when he tells us that "many worthwhile stories are told about Hayreddin". However, in the words of Kaldellis, here "the Turkish original only haunts the text" since "it is no longer alive".⁵⁷ In order to understand this and other stories, it is necessary to study them side by side in the context of political events and social circumstances. This is a project begun by Paul Wittek, but only in the broadest, most impressionistic terms, and under the influence of a romantic view of history. Today, however, the time is ripe for a more detailed, careful, and comprehensive examination, one which should transcend the arbitrary boundaries of language, period, and genre.

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56 Kaldellis, *A New Herodotos*, 126–147. On Laonikos Chalkokondyles and his sources, see also Akışık, "Self and Other in the Renaissance".

57 Kaldellis, *A New Herodotos*, 140.

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PART 3

*From Khwaf to Alexandria: The Accommodation
of West-Asian Peripheries of Power*



Iranian Elites under the Timurids

Beatrice F. Manz

The pre-modern history of the Islamic Middle East is seen largely in two contexts: the court and the city. This is what our sources will illuminate for us. The cities we learn about are the largest ones—the dynastic and regional capitals. The elites described are the ones who inhabit these two major venues; the dynasty and standing army, personnel of the court and chancellery (*dīwān*), and city notables, especially the religious classes. The bureaucrats might influence administrative policy, while the power of the *‘ulama’* lay in their social influence and their ability to act as intermediaries between state and population. Seeking the link between government and society, naturally then we have looked to the relationship between court and city.

In the territory of Iran, with which I am concerned here, pre-Islamic society has been presented very differently. Regions were dominated by landed elites: on one level great lords and below them the famous gentry class, the *dihqāns*, central to both Sassanian administration and military might. There has been a general consensus among historians that this system changed gradually after the Arab conquest. At least at the lower level, the Iranian landowning elites remained important through the Samanid dynasty (819–1005 AD). After that they fade from view in the medieval historical sources, especially from the Seljukid period (1038–1194) when Turkic nomads from the steppe became rulers over much of the Middle East. From this time on we read about Iranian bureaucrats and *‘ulama’*, but the military has usually been understood to belong primarily to the Turks, whether slave soldiers or free nomad troops. In general, modern historical writing has mirrored this picture.¹ The question we need to ask is whether the regional Iranian elite actually lost direct political and military importance, or simply became less visible in the written sources. I am using the term “Iranian” here in the sense in which medieval historians used the term “tājik”: meaning the non-turkic, primarily settled, population of Iran and Central Asia, in contrast to the Turks, identified as originally nomadic peoples of the steppe.

¹ See for example: Garthwaite, *The Persians*, pp. 107, 124–125; Amitai, “Armies and their economic basis in Iran”, pp. 539–544.

The position of the Iranian elite, particularly in relation to military activity, has begun to receive attention over the last decade and a half. For the larger cities, the importance of both the urban population and the city notables in military defense has been clearly demonstrated. Several scholars writing on the middle periods of Islamic history (c. 1138–1500) have shown that the urban populations remained active in city defense under the leadership of city officials. It is harder to illuminate the position of local elites in smaller cities and in more rural areas, which of course made up the majority of territory and population. Even for such significant cities as Kashan, Qazwin or Damghan, we have almost no information. The sources give us just enough evidence to show that a significant number of elite Iranians continued to engage in military activity, but we have to strain to see them. The relationship of elite status to land ownership also remains uncertain, though the fact that Iranian elites continued to hold regional power—as I shall show—presupposes an income from land, whether owned outright, or by government grants. (*iqṭā'*).²

Despite the paucity of evidence, I want to pose several questions about the nature of the Iranian elite, looking at both the civilian and the military sphere. I will engage in speculation beyond what the sources fully support and suggest that we consider the likelihood that Iranian landed elites remained widespread, active and multifaceted, even in periods of strong central rule. I believe this is true not only of the city populations, which have already been studied, but of the elites of towns and rural regions as well. Although some of my conclusions must remain tentative, it seems to me that we can no longer accept uncritically the picture our sources suggest, of a politically weak elite, active primarily in civilian affairs. Since we know that our sources distort our picture, we need to work actively to correct the image they present.

1 The Problem of the Sources

Before we can attempt to understand the Iranian elites, we must face the extent of our ignorance. We are hampered in our search for understanding not only by the lack of sources, but also by the programmatic nature of the information our texts give us. Since we have very few original documents for the pre-modern period, we are dependent on sources in which information has been collected and organized for a specific purpose. There are several types of systematic distortion common to all the works at our disposal.

2 On this subject see Paul, *Lokale und imperiale Herrschaft im Iran des 12. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 119, 146.

One problem comes from the genres into which historical writing was divided. The political narrative is given in historical chronicles which focus on ruler and army; these are accounts of campaigns, disposition of territory, dynastic and court events. Bureaucrats appear here occasionally when appointed, dismissed or associated with a particular event. The city notables and religious classes appear more rarely, usually in very short mentions. Our major source of information on the Iranian elites outside army and court is the biographical literature, which provides notices on the lives of ulama, poets, bureaucrats, and Sufis. Here the ruler or a prince may appear, but political events, campaigns and the Turco-Mongolian military play a small part.³ Thus the organization of information in the sources emphasizes separation between the Iranian and Turco-Mongolian populations, and between civilian and military spheres.

Another systematic distortion in our sources, particularly from the Seljukid period on, is the tendency to suppress coverage of Iranian military activity because the military was considered the sphere of the dynasty and its standing armies, with the occasional assistance of nomadic populations. War for religious purposes was one exception to this; otherwise histories regularly downplayed the military role of city or rural populations. This is particularly true of the histories written for the central court, on which we depend for much of our information on military activity.⁴ Even where regional armies are mentioned

3 One can take as examples the famous biographical collection by the poet and vizier Navā'i, *Majālis al-naḡā'is* (Persian translations from the Chaghatay original: The *Latā'ifnāma* of Fakhri Harāti, and a translation by Muḡammad b. Mubārak Qazwīnī), and 'Abd al-Raḡmān Jāmī's work on the lives of well-known Sufis, *Nafahāt al-uns*. An exception to the rule is the biographical collection of Dawlatshāh Samarqandī on the lives of poets; the unusual focus here is due probably to the fact that the author came from a military family, and himself held military posts in his early years (see Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 62). Biographies of bureaucrats, who worked closely with both rulers and commanders, contain more information on politics and military campaigns, but little on the part that viziers played in them. The two collections from the Timurid period are: Khwāndamīr, *Dastūr*, and 'Uqaylī, *Āthār al-wuzarā'*.

4 For the earlier period see Durand-Guédy, "Iranians at War under Turkish Domination", pp. 588–590, 595. For the Timurid period, we have two histories of the reign of Temūr, the *Ẓafarnāma* of Niẓām al-Dīn Shāmī written towards the end of Temūr's life, and the *Ẓafarnāma* of Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī, written in Shiraz during Shāhrukh's reign, and based on Shāmī's history; both are focused strongly on Temūr himself. (Shāmī, *Ẓafarnāma*; Yazdī, *Ẓafarnāma*). For the later periods there are four major histories, all written by scholars or bureaucrats close to the court and under court patronage. The history of Ḥāfiz-i Abrū, written for Shāhrukh, incorporates and expands the *Ẓafarnāma* of Niẓām al-Dīn Shāmī, continuing the story to the time of his death in 833/1430. This history in turn became the foundation of the *Maṭla' al-Sa'dayn wa majma' al-baḡrayn* of 'Abd al-Razzāq Samarqandī, who served both

and where it is clear that they consist of Iranian troops, histories rarely report Iranian performance in battle or the names of regional commanders. Local military powers appear somewhat more clearly during periods of disorder, when no powerful state dominated the region and the limelight. At such times leading families took advantage of the confusion to establish control over their own regions and became significant actors in a general struggle for power.

A few areas in Iran have local historiographical traditions producing historians with a strong attachment to the region, writing both specifically local histories and more general chronicles which contain valuable details on events in their own areas. Regional elites appear more clearly in such histories, particularly those about areas distant from the center of power, such as the Caspian regions and the desert areas of eastern Iran like Farah and Sistan, both of which were often under their own kings. In the histories of these places we can see something of the activities of a second tier of actors, the lords and commanders under local kings. Histories of the regions close to provincial or imperial capitals, such as the district of Yazd or Khurasan, provide less detailed information. However, though the difference is subtle, the role of local actors does emerge more clearly in these works than in most dynastic histories. Thus for instance, describing an uprising in Yazd in 798/1395–6, dynastic histories attribute the action to an outside amir of Turco-Mongolian descent, while local histories reveal that this amir was invited into the city by actors within it, and that not only Turco-Mongolian but also local officials were attacked.⁵ Writers describing events involving their own cities often provide valuable details on local actors ignored by the more centrally located historians. Such histories have helped scholars gain insight into the active military role played by the urban population and notables in city defense. Here it is clear that religious personnel played an important part, and the effort was most often led by the city's chief *qāḍī*. The notables and population might act in conjunction with Turco-Mongolian officials or separately. Many fighters were artisans but both they and their leaders clearly had some military experience, particularly in archery.⁶

Shāhrukh and his successor Sulṭān Abū Sa'īd, and completed his history in 875/1470. Samarqandī was trained in the religious sciences, and gives somewhat more coverage to chancellery and religious affairs. The last two historians, Muḥammad b. Khwāndshāh b. Maḥmūd, known as Mirkhwānd (d. 903/1498) and his grandson Khwāndamīr (d. 1530 or 1542), were also trained in religious sciences; both were active in the court of the last Timurid ruler, Sulṭān Ḥusayn-i Bayqara. Both likewise incorporated the work of earlier historians into their own. (See Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 51–61, for summary and references.)

5 See Manz, "Local Histories of Southern Iran"; for the Yazd uprising, pp. 272–275.

6 Durand-Guédy, "Iranians at War"; Paul, "Wehrhafte Stadter", pp. 182–190; Manz, "Nomad and Settled", pp. 428, 434–446. For an earlier period, this subject was taken up by Claude Cahen many years ago in his monograph *Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain*.

When we turn to the activity of elites in the civilian sphere, most notably within the religious professions, Sufi orders, and the *dīwān*, our sources are somewhat fuller. The biographical literature in Persian is far less detailed than it is in Arabic, especially for the middle periods, with which we are concerned here. While Arabic biographical dictionaries often provide quite long biographies covering an entire career, most Persian biographies, whether in collections or within narrative histories, rarely exceed a few paragraphs. Nonetheless we do have sketches of many scholars and some bureaucrats; there is also a rich fund of biographies of Sufi *shaykhs*, which are longer—if not more systematic—than those of other people. Grave visitation manuals provide some additional material. Such sources usually stress intellectual and family filiations, and have been widely used for social history. However, it is important to recognize that these texts, though they enlighten, also distort. The problem here is that biographical collections are usually concerned with individual professions or with individuals as they related to their occupation. The filiations they report are usually those that remain within the profession; we know of the sons who follow their fathers, and of disciples who marry into the family. But are those mentioned the only sons and the only marriageable daughters? If we do not hear about others, it might not be due to lack of success, but to their choice of a career path that does not fit into the narrative. The picture presented is not false, but we should recognize that it is also not complete and that the omissions are probably not random.

One further small fund of information is available which can help us to counteract the limitations of the master narrative, and this is the autobiographical material included by some historians in their chronicles. The narrative is almost never complete, and consists usually of brief mentions of specific occasions and relationships. Nonetheless it sometimes breaks outside of the conventions governing the central texts, to include information which would elsewhere be considered irrelevant. Here I would like to examine two examples of what can be learned. The first text I will examine is an historical compendium known as *Mujmal-i Faṣīḥī*, written by a mid-level Khurasanian bureaucrat, Aḥmad Faṣīḥ Khwāfī (d. after 1441/2). The *Mujmal* is an abbreviated chronicle starting with Adam and going up to the author's time, giving for each year a list of major events, with births and deaths of important people. Faṣīḥ Khwāfī was a native of Khurasan with strong local connections, which are evident in the history. We are able to trace something of his ancestry, career path, and acquaintance. The *Mujmal* provides us a good illustration of how an elite regional family developed and how one individual placed himself within it.

As Faṣīḥ Khwāfī reaches his own time he begins to include the members of his own extended family, and indeed the births of his own sons, despite his rather modest standing. Although Faṣīḥ and those of his close relatives he

mentions did not have distinguished careers in the Timurid *dīwān* he did come from prominent ancestors on both sides. Faṣīḥ gives the death notice of his father in the year 1393/1394, tracing his ancestry back to Abū Imāma Ṣadi, companion of the Prophet and *ḥadīth* transmitter. However, Faṣīḥ offers no information about his father's life besides his burial place, and I have found no other member of his family on this side elsewhere in the history.⁷ The family that was important locally, and which probably provided Faṣīḥ with his professional contacts, was that of his mother. This family also probably provided him with the *nisba* Khwāfī. The family claimed descent from the famous Ghaznavid vizier, Abū Naṣr Miškān, a highly suitable ancestor for a *dīwān* family, but more immediately from a warlord of Khwāf, Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad, an ambitious and rebellious servitor of the Kartid kings (1245–1389) who ruled part of Khurasan from Herat. After Majd al-Dīn's defeat by the Kartids some of his progeny apparently continued in the dynasty's service. Aside from parents and sons, Faṣīḥ mentions only two people related to him; two second cousins from his mother's branch, who appear to have served in the Herat *dīwān* during Temür's life.⁸ Faṣīḥ's history thus lets us see two things which might not appear in a general history or standard biography. The first is the choice of connections an ambitious man might use; Faṣīḥ Khwāfī clearly profited from the prominence and professional connections of his mother's family rather than that of his father. The second and related revelation is the selectivity of the connections mentioned—the only contemporary relatives who appear are his second cousins, who were in a similar career path and probably somewhat more advanced than he.

I will conclude this section with an illustration of the influence that genre and the circumstances of writing have on the information offered about a given person in historical texts. We have a good example of the differing kinds of information offered by works of varying types in the portraits they give of one particular official who combined religious, bureaucratic and military activity throughout a distinguished career. Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muḥammad Rāzī, called Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī (d. April/May 1422), was the main vizier and *ṣadr* (supervisor of religious offices) in Fars, and a prominent military commander for the Timurid prince Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh (d. 1415), who was the semi-independent governor of Fars early in the reign of Shāhrukh (r. 1409–1447). As an important provincial figure, Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī is briefly mentioned in several

7 Faṣīḥ, *Mujmal*, III, pp. 137–138.

8 Faṣīḥ, *Mujmal*, III, genealogy: pp. 110, 214, 251. We know that Faṣīḥ's relatives were dismissed by Sayyid Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad, sent by Temür to shake up the Herat *dīwān* and administration (p. 150).

sources: he is listed as vizier for Iskandar in the dynastic genealogy, the *Mu'izz al-ansāb*; he is briefly noted in the *Tadhkirat al-shu'arā* of Dawlatshāh Samarqandī (d. after 1487), which chronicles the lives both of poets and of the dynasty; and his death and burial are mentioned in the *Mujmal-i Faṣīḥī*.⁹ Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī also appears in a Sufi source: the biography of Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī Kirmānī, active in the early Timurid period. Here he appears doing honor to Shāh Ni'mat Allāh at a public audience in Shiraz, and is identified as *ṣadr* and as a student of the famous scholar Sayyid 'Alī Jurjānī.¹⁰ In each source he appears as he fits into the specific narrative being presented.

Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī was a native of Yazd, a city which produced a spate of historical writing during the Timurid period. In the local histories we learn considerably more about his activities. Three of the histories written in Yazd focus on the history of the city itself: the *Tārīkh-i Yazd* and *Tārīkh-i jadīd-i Yazd* from the Timurid period, and the somewhat later *Jāmi'-i muḥfidī*. The first two histories are concerned primarily with the built environment and where Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī is mentioned it is usually in connection with buildings, though the fuller *Tārīkh-i jadīd* also identifies him as vizier and gives several anecdotes about his life centered on his relations with the dynasty.¹¹ The *Jāmi'-i muḥfidī* includes Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī in its biographies of notable figures; here there is discussion of his learning, his service as vizier under Iskandar, and later his entertainment of Shāhrukh and his involvement in producing a cover which Shāhrukh attempted to donate to the Ka'ba.¹² In none of the histories focusing on the city of Yazd is there any mention of Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī's military activity. However, the historian Ja'farī, who wrote the *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, also produced a general history up to his time, and here Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī is listed as one of several commanders that the prince Iskandar sent on an expedition against Qum.¹³ Much the fullest account of Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī, and the only extended discussion of his military role, is found in one history, the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh-i ḥasanī*, written in 1451–1453 by Ḥasan b. Shihāb Yazdī. Here Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī's military position is given considerable prominence. This unusual emphasis is undoubtedly due to the fact that the author served in the army under Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī, as commander of ten men. He states that Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī was *tovachī* (troop inspector, usually also in charge of conscription) of a *tūmen*—that is to say a troop theoretically numbering 10,000, the largest size of regiment in the army. Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī also commanded a special regiment

9 *Mu'izz al-ansāb*, f. 108a; Dawlatshāh, *Tadhkirat*, p. 375 (mentioned as vizier for a different prince); Faṣīḥ, *Mujmal*, 111, p. 251.

10 Aubin, *Matériaux pour la biographie de Shah Ni'matullah Wali Kermani* pp. 86–87, 180.

11 Ja'farī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 121; Kātib, *Tārīkh-i jadīd-i Yazd*, pp. 147–149, 207.

12 Bāfqī, *Jāmi'-i muḥfidī*, 111, pp. 155–157.

13 Ja'farī, *Tārīkh-i kabīr*, f. 303a.

known as the Qushun-i Jānbāz, and according to Ḥasanī accompanied the prince Iskandar on all important expeditions.¹⁴ When we take all these histories together, we can see the progression in information and the way in which different roles are separated; in sources written outside the province, Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī receives an occasional mention as vizier; in provincial biographical and urban literature he appears in his civilian role, while the locally written history describes local campaigns in sufficient detail to list him on one campaign. For an understanding of his military role we depend on the historical chance of a particular author who served under him.

2 Iranian Elites before the Timurids

While the central subject of this chapter is the elite of the Timurid period, the role of Iranians under the Timurids was not an exception but the continuation of an earlier pattern predating the Mongol invasion and lasting through it. I will therefore briefly review what we know about the military activities of the Iranian elites in earlier Islamic periods, concentrating on those outside the major cities. Despite our problematical sources it is possible to trace the evolution of the Iranian elite up to the Timurids, at least in its broadest outlines. Looking at the history of Iran from the Arab conquest we can see first the continuation of the *dihqāns* as a landed elite with a military tradition lasting through the Samanid dynasty, and after them an elite of probably mixed provenance, who still held regional power at a local level and led retinues of soldiers. In several studies, Jürgen Paul has traced the activities of regional Iranian elites through several centuries, showing them active particularly in matters of local administration, but also sometimes in the military.¹⁵ Recent studies on Iran under the Seljukids likewise show families wielding regional military power; the picture is clearest for the city but at least some of the militias mentioned were clearly recruited from the countryside and used outside the city.¹⁶ In the later Seljukid period the great notable families of Isfahan were able to keep out Seljukid claimants for power, and at the end of the Seljukid period

14 Yazdī, *Ḥasanī*, pp. 14, 24; Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 149.

15 Jürgen Paul provides an excellent detailed discussion of local Iranian elites in the twelfth century in his book, *Lokale und imperiale Herrschaft im Iran des 12. Jahrhunderts*, cited above. Several earlier works of his also provide information on elites before the Timurid period: *The state and the military: the Samanid case*; “Where did the *dihqāns* go?”; *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler*, pp. 93–146.

16 Durand-Guédy, *Iranian Elites*, pp. 58, 117, 174–176, 218.

much of actual power within the Isfahan region was in the hands of local notable families, allying with outside powers for their own advantage.¹⁷

A particularly active period for Iranian military elites is the one just preceding the Mongol invasion, when Seljukid power had faded and the Khwarazmshāhs (c. 1077–1231), centered in the Aral Sea region, the caliph in Baghdad, and the Iranian Ghurid dynasty (c. 1100–1215) of the Herat region had exhausted themselves in their struggle over the Iranian plateau. The presence of competing claims in the area led to a proliferation of smaller regional powers which together controlled a large portion of the Iranian plateau. We find local dynasties and their servitors in Mazandaran, sometimes stretching to Damghan and Simnan on the northern corridor, in Quhistan, Ghuristan—the area around Bamyan, stretching to Herat—, in Sistan, Hormuz, Fars, and Luristan. These small states were frequently at war, using local armies under subordinate commanders, who sometimes switched allegiance to other dynasties. There was also considerable internal dissention caused by rivals for power within the dynasty and commanders eager for adventure.¹⁸ Within the Khwarazmshāh's domains likewise, the importance of regional lords was recognized by the historian Nasawī (d. 1249–50) and the geographer Yāqūt (d. 1229), who attributed some of the weakness of the realm before the Mongol onslaught to the Khwarazmshāh's execution of members of several powerful families, including the governors of major cities.¹⁹

Two histories from the early Mongol period give us an unusually detailed description of politics in eastern Iran on the eve of the Mongol invasion.²⁰ Among other things they allow us to follow the activities of regional military elites quite clearly in Ghuristan, a mountainous region in which prominent families centered themselves in fortresses and competed for power over neighboring territories. Here for several decades before and after the Mongol conquest a number of powerful families vied for control over Herat and its region, some remaining loyal to the declining Ghurid dynasty, and others eager to ally with outside powers to gain their ends. In the end one of these families—the Kartids—surrendered their fortress to join the Mongols and founded a new polity which lasted to the Timurid conquest. Until the end of the Ilkhanate the Kartids remained loyal vassals to the Ilkhans, then becoming a largely independent regional power until their defeat by Temür in 784–5/1383. We find several

17 Durand-Guédy, *Iranian Elites*, pp. 172–173, 257–258, 281–292.

18 Manz, “Nomads and Regional Armies”, pp. 6–11.

19 Paul, “L'invasion mongole comme ‘révélateur’ de la société iranienne”, pp. 45–46.

20 Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, trans. Raverty; Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Ḥabībī; Nasawī, *Sīrat as-Sultān Džhalāl ad-Dīn Mankburny*.

Ghurid commanders incorporated into the armies of the Khwarazmshāhs, and others following their own rulers into India where the Ghurids founded the Delhi Sultanate.²¹ Most remained and served the Kartid dynasty, under which the Ghurid amirs wielded considerable political power, especially at times of weak rule.²² The Kartid army was strong enough to inflict some defeats on the nomad armies of the Ulus Chaghatay, a tribal confederation based in Transoxiana, until Temür's rise to power changed the equation.²³

Mongol conquest and rule did not destroy the power of local Iranian elites; in some places indeed they may well have profited. In Fars, ruled by the Turkmen Salghurid dynasty (1148–1270) under Mongol oversight, regional elites became agents of Salghurids and Mongols, serving as governors or local lords and administering many of the smaller cities and villages and referred to collectively as *hukkām* and *mulūk*. Despite the increase in crown lands Iranian notables, including shaykhs and bureaucrats, were able to build up large landed estates. Viziers, local notables, and the *hukkām* and *mulūk* all took an active part in politics and were not slow to enrich themselves both at the expense of the population and with bribes extracted from Mongol amirs.²⁴

At the end of the Ilkhanid dynasty both Turco-Mongolian amirs and Iranian commanders hastened to take advantage; of the six substantial successor polities which emerged within the struggle, four were ruled by Iranians. The Kartid dynasty of Herat has already been mentioned. In Fars two dynasties founded by Iranian servitors of the Ilkhans—the Injuids (c. 1325–53) and the Muzaffarids (1314–93)—competed for power. They were constantly at war, both against each other and within their own realms. It was not only within the vassal polities that local lords kept their power under the Mongols. Even in western Khurasan, which was a center for Mongol power during the Ilkhanate, regional elites were among the political powers active after the Ilkhans. These elites—religious and secular—provided the impetus and most of the leadership for the Sarbadar movement, which controlled varying amounts of territory in the region from 1336 to 1381. The movement began with a rebellion by 'Abd al-Razzāq, member of a powerful family of Bashtin, near Sabzawar. His father is described as an amir, suggesting a military career. Beginning with his own retainers, allies and relatives, he took Sabzawar, and from this time to the end of the dynasty we find the Sabzawari aristocracy as part of the leadership, not

21 Manz, "Nomads and Regional Armies", pp. 17–20; Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 17–18, 41–42.

22 Potter, "The Kart Dynasty of Herat", pp. 68, 132–134.

23 Aubin, "Le Khanat de Čağatai et le Khorasan", pp. 23, 29, 35.

24 Aigle, *Le Fārs sous la domination mongole*, pp. 90–94, 128–129, 133, 138, 152–153.

infrequently in competition with the elite of Bashtin. Several different families were active here, sometimes in alliance and sometimes in competition, and when the movement was powerful, other regional powers voluntarily submitted.²⁵ Despite frequent wars with its neighbors, the dynasty survived up to the time of Temür.

Alongside these powers were countless smaller realms kept or carved out in the post-Ilkhanid confusion. The historian Faryūmadī, describing the disorder after the Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd's death in 1335, gives a list of local uprisings and seizures. Some of the actors appear to have been Turco-Mongolian amirs, but many were Iranians. Thus, for example, power in the region of Kashan was taken for a while by Sayyid Latīf-Allāh Kāshī, a local *sayyid* and *naqīb*; Khwāja Tāj al-Dīn ʿAlī Aṣīl controlled Qum for a time; Amīr Jalāl Khurāsānī held Qalʿa-i Āwaral; Amīr Masʿūd Wazwāʿī held the fortress of Gīw until killed by his son.²⁶

As we can see from the brief summary above, it is clear that Iranian elites continued to be part of the political and military landscape after the advent of foreign dynasties basing their power on armies of steppe soldiers, although these Iranian soldiers had ceased to be part of the master narrative presented by the historians. Only a few individuals reached high leadership positions within the central army or government under Turco-Mongolian rule. The polities created by such people, for instance those of the the Kartids, Muzaffarids and the Sarbadarids, often retained autonomy for significant periods but sometimes had to accept Turco-Mongolian overlordship. Nonetheless Iranian regional elites continued to exist and to play a significant part, not only in local administration, but also in military affairs.

3 Elites in the Timurid Period

The early Timurid period—the reigns of Temür (r. 1370–1405) and particularly of his son Shāhrukh (r. 1409–1447)—was a time of unusually centralized control for Iran, in which a number of subordinate dynasties became more fully integrated into the state. Nonetheless, many smaller cities and regions remained under their own rulers for some time, and local military elites fought within Timurid provincial armies. Temür destroyed the regional powers strong enough to pose a potential threat: the Turco-Mongolian Jalayirids and the Iranian Kartids, Sarbadarids, and Muzaffarids. He also exiled the Iranian Marʿashī

25 Smith, *The History of the Sarbadār Dynasty*, pp. 103–104, 115, 119, 122–123, 145; Melville, “Sarbadārīds”.

26 Shabānkārāʿī, *Majmaʿ al-ansāb* (this includes Faryūmadī's continuation), pp. 342–343.

sayyids of Mazandaran. A number of the former servitors of these dynasties were then enrolled in his armies. Many rulers near the periphery of the realm submitted and retained their thrones: the rulers of Badakhshan, Sistan, Farah, Hormuz, Luristan, and much of the Caspian region continued as Timurid vassals.²⁷ Of the smaller dynasties, many remained in place, though the sources give us only incidental information so we cannot gauge what proportion of the realm was fully incorporated. At the end of Ilkhanid rule we find the city of Qum under Iranian control, and the Timurid sources state that it remained under local rule through Temür's reign until it was taken by Temür's grandson Iskandar Sulṭān in 1414/1415.²⁸ The nearby city of Sawa also appears to have remained under local rulership, as did the region of Tabas-i Gilak in Quhistan, where the family of the fortress keeper Amīr Shaykh 'Alī carved out a realm of respectable size along the trade route between Khurasan and Fars, lasting into the reign of Temür.²⁹

Temür often confirmed the offices of local powers who submitted, and some of these are associated with quite small places. For instance we see Temür passing through the regional town (*qaṣaba*) Kusuya in Khurasan, and showing favor to Pahlawān Mahdī Kūsūyī who came out to greet him.³⁰ Local rulers often hastened to show submission to a successful conqueror; a number could thus increase their holdings, as did for instance Sayyid Riḍā Kiyā of Gilan.³¹ It is likely that the numerous "local rulers" who came to offer submission to Temür on his arrival in their region included men at this level as well as the more prominent rulers like those of Shirwan and Gilan whose names appear in the histories.³²

A number of Iranian elites who submitted to Temür came fully into Temür's service and held quite important places, sometimes outside their own regions. Most notable among these are the amirs of Khurasan. The last ruler of the Sarbadars, Khwāja 'Alī Mu'ayyad Sabzawārī, surrendered the town to Temür and entered his armies, where he and his family served with some distinction. He was allowed to keep control of much of his former territory and, at his death in 788/1386–7, his family and followers were granted important

27 Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, pp. 90–94, 137, 156; Aubin, "Les princes d'Ormuz du XIII^e au XV^e siècle", pp. 111–119.

28 Drechsler, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Qom im Mittelalter*, pp. 23, 237; Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 129.

29 Aubin, "La fin de l'état Sarbadâr du Khorasan", p. 98.

30 Faṣīḥ, *Mujmal*, III, p. 116.

31 Shāmī, *Zafarnāma*, (Volume II contains additions made by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū.) II, p. 171.

32 See for example Shāmī, *Zafarnāma*, I, pp. 101, 294.

regions in Khurasan: Bayhaq, Juwayn, Nishapur, and Faryumad.³³ The family seems to have fallen out of favor early in Shāhrukh's reign; one member was executed, and many of their lands were confiscated. Later however some of the lands were returned, and a descendant known as Amīr Shāhī turns up as a prominent poet and landowner with connections to the Timurid dynasty. In the succession struggle after Shāhrukh's death a Sabzawārī is mentioned as fortress keeper.³⁴

Another Khurasanian amir prominent in Temūr's service was Jamshīd Qārin Ghūrī, who was appointed to Damghan and later made *darughā* (military governor) of Sari in Mazandaran, apparently with some Khurasanian troops under his command. On his death his son was appointed to succeed him.³⁵ One of the fullest enumerations of Temūr's commanders is the account of the long siege of Takrit in 796/1393; here we find a few Iranian commanders important enough to receive mention; they include one from Sawa and one from Qum. The conquest and incorporation of a region or town should not be seen as a sign that the local military elite were disenfranchised. The Timurids, like the Mongols before them, appointed military governors —*darughas*— to the cities and fortresses they controlled and sometimes also to vassal powers. These officials brought a small number of troops with them, usually in the low hundreds, thus not enough to control more than the city or town itself. While the appointment of a *darughā* signaled submission to the ruling power, the *darughas* might share power with local rulers or elites; thus their presence does not signal the extinction of regional commanders.³⁶

The question before us is how to see below the ruling stratum of the Iranian leadership to the elite families who served them or the Timurids. As I suggested earlier, one solution is to look at regional histories, particularly those in the areas which retained relative independence and thus allow us to see into local politics. Just as the major dynastic histories present us with a history of the dynasty and its major servitors, so regional histories include the activities of people in the retinue of local rulers—men controlling towns or villages and leading modest military contingents. The historian Mar'ashī who recorded the history of Mazandaran and Gilan in the Timurid period presents a vivid picture of local politics. Comparing his account with that of the dynastic histories for the same incidents, we can see how much is left out of the central Timurid

33 Shāmī, *Zafarnāma*, I, p. 99, II, pp. 90, 118; Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, *Činḡ opuscules*, p. 26.

34 Faṣīḥ, *Mujmal*, III, p. 194, Dawlatshāh, *Tadhkirat*, pp. 426–427; Ṭīhrānī, *Diyyārbakriyya*, p. 323.

35 Shāmī, *Zafarnāma* II, p. 66; Mar'ashī, *Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān*, pp. 237–238, 244–246.

36 Manz, "The Office of *Darughā* under Tamerlane", pp. 59–61.

chronicles. Mar'ashī's account of the politics of the Kār-Kiyā dynasty (1367/8–1592) of Lahijan and Ranikuh in Gilan for example shows constant political and military activity with the participation of neighboring dynasties related by marriage, numerous warring relatives, village headmen and fortress keepers, and local lords including the masters of Rasht, Lamsar and Kuhdum.³⁷

In the provinces central to the Timurid state we can rarely see below the top level of Iranian leadership. One exception is the region of Qum, which as I have noted was under local control through Temür's reign. The story of the taking of Qum from its ruler Muḥammad Qumī by Shāhrukh's nephew Iskandar Sulṭān in 1412/1413 includes accounts of the actions of the keeper of a nearby fortress, a rebellious amir within the city, Muḥammad Qumī's nephew and his retinue, and the ruler of Sawa. It is clear that this was a lively political field in which indigenous elites allied and fought each other. The success of the local leader depended heavily on the loyalty of the elites under him. In the event, Qum was taken with the help of one of Muḥammad Qumī's servitors and a Timurid governor was installed, but we still find local amirs active in the city and region well after this. Sawa remained under its own ruler probably at least through Shāhrukh's reign, despite his brief defection to the Qaraqoyunlu.³⁸ The city of Kashan was also part of this region, and there are some hints that its elites remained important in both the military and the political spheres. The city was taken for Shāhrukh in 818/1415–16, but shortly after this when one of the Timurid princes rebelled and took refuge with the Qaraqoyunlu tribal confederation of eastern Anatolia (1380–1468), Timurid rule appeared less secure and there were "disturbances" in several areas, including Kashan.³⁹ During Shāhrukh's final illness, when his grandson Sulṭān Muḥammad was governor of the region of Qum, rulers of local regions began to turn to him and those of Kashan were among these.⁴⁰ Thus it seems likely that despite its inclusion within the Timurid realm, Kashan still retained some level of autonomy under its traditional elites, who influenced decisions about what stand to take in times of contested leadership. Sawa, Qum, and Kashan together form a large region in the middle of the Timurid realm, and it is significant to find the continuation of regional elites in a powerful position here.

In the more fully incorporated regions, Iranians entered directly into Timurid service in military as well as civilian roles. Analysis of the Timurid histories indicates that the armies of the provinces played a significant part in campaigns,

37 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 142–144.

38 Ḥāfiz-i Abru, *Zubdat*, pp. 481–483; Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 129–130.

39 Ḥāfiz-i Abru, *Zubdat*, pp. 540, 591.

40 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 252, 256.

and that soldiers were recruited from the local Iranian population. Most were probably footmen, but there were some cavalry among them. We rarely hear of their commanders by name, but it is clear that many were Iranian, and seen as professionals.⁴¹ They seem to have included city populations and people of varied background beginning at a fairly low level and rising within the ranks. One example is two druggists from the bazar of Shiraz, who served in the army in Fars and rose to the status of commander, apparently through royal favor.⁴² In a number of cases we simply hear of regional armies with their commanders or of the *sardārān* (commanders) of a particular region, one or two of whom may be named.⁴³ For instance the history of Shāhrukh's reign mentions *sardārs* of Qum and Kashan taking part in Shāhrukh's campaigns under the Chaghatay governor.⁴⁴ There is some suggestion of an hereditary military elite: in one battle the history states that one *tūmen* of the prince Iskandar's army was made up of *sardārs* or children of *sardārs* of Fars. These deserted in battle to join the ranks of the Isfahani opponents.⁴⁵

Another soldier probably of urban origin who campaigned in the provincial army was the historian Tāj al-Dīn Ḥasan Yazdī, mentioned earlier for his discussion of his superior, Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn Rāzī. His autobiographical information is of particular interest because it tells us of a career at a level which would otherwise not appear in the sources. Tāj al-Dīn began his military service as a *tovachi* of a unit of ten men in the army of Yazd; at this time he was about twenty-four. He gives a vivid description of the army's campaign near Hamadan in the succession struggle after Temür's death, in which his regiment first won and then lost an astounding amount of booty.⁴⁶ Somewhat later we find him campaigning in Kerman, still *tovachi*, now in the army of Yazd and Abarquh, which included a corps of 450 missile throwers.⁴⁷ Later he served the governor of Kerman in bureaucratic and religious offices, supervising the *ashraf khāna-i khāṣṣa*, *zakat*, and the camp market. He states that for thirty years he managed the *waqfs* of Kerman.⁴⁸ At the top level, the command of regional armies was determined by the governor or the ruler and sometimes given to viziers; one of

41 Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, pp. 96–100; idem, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 123–126.

42 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 126.

43 See for example: Faṣīḥ, *Mujmal*, 111, p. 226; Ṭihrānī, *Diyārbakriyya*, p. 350.

44 Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, *Zubdat*, p. 720.

45 Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, *Zubdat*, p. 347.

46 Yazdī, *Ḥasanī*, pp. 14, 30–32, 42.

47 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 53, 124.

48 Yazdī, *Ḥasanī*, pp. 15, 48, 93.

Temür's viziers was appointed commander of the "Tajik forces", and the vizier Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī, mentioned above, commanded a *tūmen* of the army of Fars.⁴⁹

Looking at Iranian elites under the Timurids then, we can see a spectrum of independence and activity, from local rulers acting as vassals and joining Timurid campaigns leading their own troops, to Iranian commanders serving the Timurids directly and commanded by officers appointed from above. In the middle there is a shadowy group of men controlling small territories, whose status is hard to determine. We really cannot tell what level of autonomy was enjoyed by the rulers of Kusuya, Sawa and Qum. For all of these people however, the level of power and independence they enjoyed depended on shifting circumstances. Over the early Timurid period, as with earlier times, we see the pendulum swinging back and forth between centralization and local control. During the disturbances after Shāhrukh's death, vividly described by the historian Ṭihrānī, Iranian military elites again emerge as significant actors, mentioned by name.⁵⁰ In periods of regional struggle members of the Iranian elite appear as independent rulers over a variety of realms, some ruling important cities and large portions of a province, others a few hundred square kilometers with a few towns. With the reassertion of central power, some rulers submit while some resist and are removed, but the underlying stratum of military actors remains in place, sometimes serving the higher power, sometimes pursuing local rivalries. When central control weakens, they will reemerge in the pages of the histories.

4 The Nature of the Iranian Provincial Elite

In the first part of this chapter I have attempted to illuminate the role of the Iranian elite in the military sphere, to counteract the silence of our sources. A question I want to pose now is how separate and different Iranian military families were from the religious and bureaucratic lineages more fully described in the biographical literature. The literature about professional groups stresses doctrinal and familial relationships, sometimes allowing us to follow several generations. As I stated above, biographies give us the impression of relatively closed professions, with families in which a given specialization passed down from one generation to the next. They also naturally focus on the most prominent figures, usually those active in the larger cities, and it is the life of these cities which has shaped our understanding of both the elite and the professions

49 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 106–107, 124.

50 Ṭihrānī, *Ḍiyārbakriyya*, pp. 295, 350, 323, 326, 332, 343.

they followed. However, a number of the families who produced bureaucratic and religious professionals were centered in smaller cities and more rural regions. Here I will attempt to follow them back into the countryside.

When we go outside the major cities and try to pass from the lives of individuals to those of families, we face additional challenges from the silences of our sources. One solution, again, is to turn to the biographies of historians. Two historians from the Mongol period provide examples of families in which combinations of military and civilian activity were traditional. One is the historian Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Nasawī (d. 1249/50), who served under the Khwarazmshāhs at the time of the Mongol invasion. His family held a fortress and surrounding villages near Nasa in Khurasan as freehold, which he claimed had belonged to his family from the beginning of Islamic rule in Khurasan. He was trained in both military and bureaucratic affairs, achieving mastery of Arabic as well as Persian and expertise in chancellery practice. It appears that his family had a tradition of administrative service to the Khwarazmshāhs, and probably to earlier dynasties as well.⁵¹

Another historian of the Mongol conquest was Qāḍī Minhāj al-Dīn b. Sirāj al-Dīn Jūzjānī (d. probably after 1265), active first in Ghur and then in India in the service of the Delhi sultanate (1206–1555). His father's family stemmed from Juzjan in northern Khurasan and was noted for its learning. On his mother's side he was connected to the Ghurid dynasty. Members of both families held the office of *qāḍī*. In Jūzjānī's paternal line, the only person whose career we know about was his father, who was *qāḍī* both in the army and in Bamiyan where he also served as *muḥtasib* (religious inspector of market practice and public morality) and supervisor of two madrasas. He is mentioned acting as an envoy but never in a military role.⁵² On Jūzjānī's maternal side, we have more information and find a mix of religious and military activity. Two relatives receive mention. One, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Salām Tūlakī, apparently a first cousin of the author's grandfather, was put in charge of the fortress Tabarhinda on its conquest by the Ghurid ruler in about 1191–2; both the cousin and the author's grandfather are identified as *qāḍīs*. Once appointed to Tabarhinda Ḍiyā' al-Dīn quickly requested that 1200 horsemen from Hindustan and Ghazna be sent to him to attach to his regiment. Later he was put in charge of Junabad.⁵³ About thirty years later in 1220–2 when the town of Tulak, closely connected to Minhāj's family, was given up to one of the Ghurid rulers,—another relative, Qāḍī Jalāl al-Dīn Majd al-Mulk, was installed as governor

51 Paul, "Dihqāns", pp. 23–26.

52 Bosworth, "Menhāj"; Moin, "Qāḍī-Minhāj Sirāj al-Juzjānī".

53 Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, trans. Raverty, pp. 381, 457–458; ed. Ḥabībī, I, pp. 397–398.

(*ḥākīm*).⁵⁴ The author was himself a *qāḍī* and was appointed to several religious offices during his long service in India, primarily as *qāḍī* but also as principal of a madrasa. In his early years he was active also militarily; in 1222–3 he helped to defend Tulak against the Mongols, and for four years after that joined with members of other major families in Tulak to fight the invaders. He mentions that the people of Tulak were all kinsmen and brothers.⁵⁵ What we have here then is someone coming from two families with a tradition of religious training, one of which also played a military role over several generations; either one or both families married into a regional elite which was militarily active.

We can find several people who appear to come from provincial families of mixed profession serving in the *dīwān* in the Timurid period. One is the family of Sayyid Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn Junābādī, active in the *dīwān* under both Temür and Shāhrukh. Sayyid Zayn al-Dīn was a landowner in Junabad, a large town in Quhistan, who had at least some training in the religious sciences. His son likewise served in the *dīwān* and was also known for his learning in both exoteric and esoteric sciences.⁵⁶ While the Junābādī family combined bureaucratic and religious activity, that of Jalāl Islām was involved in military and bureaucratic affairs. Jalāl Islām came from a regional family in Tabas Masinan, in Quhistan, which clearly had local military power. His brother served as fortress keeper and governor.⁵⁷ Jalāl himself served as a vizier in Temür's *dīwān* until he was slandered and dismissed from the *dīwān*. He was subsequently put in charge of the Tajik forces in the army. The historian and bureaucrat Isfizārī (d. 1510), writing in the later Timurid period, mentions a member of Jalāl Islām's family as an acquaintance; he is given the title *amūr*, and presented as a cultured person, sending a *rubāʿī* (a quatrain of poetry) to the author, who answered in kind.⁵⁸

Under the Timurids two regions provided an exceptionally large number of bureaucrats to the *dīwān*; these were Simnan and Khwaf. Both seem to have

54 Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, trans. Raverty, p. 1060; ed. Ḥabībī, II, pp. 134–135. The passages concerning the author's maternal relatives are confusing, particularly the second one. Raverty decided that the two relatives mentioned in these two incidents were probably one person, and that the word "grandfather" in the first passage should be considered an interpolation. However, since the names and *nasabs* of the two men are different and the events described are thirty years apart, I suggest that these are probably different men; the relationship of the second however is not the same in all manuscripts, and in one variant, his position is *ḥākīm* of Nishapur; what is clear is that he was a relative, and that he held the position of city governor.

55 Bosworth, "Menhāj"; Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, trans. Raverty, p. 1061.

56 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 107.

57 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 106–107.

58 Isfizārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, I, p. 114.

had a tradition of military, religious and bureaucratic professions. It is significant that the notable figures stemming from these regions did not abandon local attachments when they left to pursue a career elsewhere. Many used the money from their positions to endow institutions and public works in their native regions. It is perhaps for this reason that the areas continued as training grounds for various professions, most notably but not exclusively, the *dīwān*. In Simnan the combination of professions dated at least from the Mongol period, when we find Simnānīs as religious figures, bureaucrats and military men. In his collection of *dīwān* biographies, the *Dastūr al-wuzarā'*, the historian Khwādamīr (d. 1539/40) writes that the region of Simnan had two prominent extended families (*qabila*): the Bālīcha and the Bahrāmī. The Bahrāmī traced its descent from Bahrām Gūr, in classic Iranian fashion. These two families stood out among the rest for their aristocratic lineage; they commanded obedience and gave refuge to the population. There is no explicit mention of military activity here, though the mention of obedience and protection suggest some level of military or paramilitary force. Two Simnānī viziers of the Timurid period were active militarily. One of the prominent Simnānī viziers who served under Temūr and Shāhrukh died in battle, and Malik Ḥusayn Simnānī, almost certainly a member of the Bālīcha, served in the *dīwān* in Herat, then moved to the *dīwān* in Fars, where he led troops on important expeditions, and is mentioned as part of the council of great amirs.⁵⁹

We are particularly well informed about the region of Khwaf in Quhistan, which produced a large number of men prominent in Khurasan, some of them historians. I have already discussed the family of the historian Faṣīḥ Khwāfī, active in the Herat *dīwān*. Here the family progenitor, Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad, was a military figure with regional power whose son came into the service of the Kartid rulers of Herat. Faṣīḥ himself and the two contemporary relatives he mentions seem to have been active in the *dīwān*.⁶⁰ In the later Timurid period especially, we find members of the family active in both the bureaucracy and in the religious sciences.⁶¹ Among those working in the *dīwān* in the later period was the vizier Qiwām al-Dīn Nizām al-Mulk Khwāfī, patron of the historian Isfīzārī, who gives him lavish praise and lists his many illustrious ancestors and relatives. The list of families named among his progenitors gives us an excellent illustration of what was considered prestigious, and of the variety of elite intermarriages. Like Faṣīḥ Khwāfī, Qiwām al-Dīn came from Khwaf and was descended from Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad Māyīzhnābādī. He also claimed

59 Khwādamīr, *Dastūr*, pp. 380–381; Manz *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 101–103.

60 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, pp. 96–98.

61 Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, p. 99.

descent from the Sufi Ḥiḍrat Shāh Sanjān, whose family and shrine are highlighted in Faṣīḥ Khwāfi's work. Two more major figures of the Khwaf region appear as ancestors: Malik-i Zūzan, who ruled in the region just before the Mongol invasion, and Qādi Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad of Zuzan, prominent in the Mongol period.⁶² The Sufi shaykh Aḥmad-i Jām, known as Zhinda Pīl, also counts among Qiwām al-Dīn's ancestors; this connects him to the Shaykhs of Jam, also centered in Quhistan. Other ancestors are the amirs of Raza, near Bakharz, powerful in the Kartid period.⁶³ In addition to incidental mentions of relations, Isfizārī gives a list of Qiwām al-Dīn's ancestors by category, which goes further afield and further back, and may well be embellished. Here there are *sayyids*, great Sufi shaykhs, kings (of Badakhshan and Sistan), pillars of state including the Barmakids, and the great viziers of Sanjan and Mathirabad.⁶⁴

Leaving out stock figures such as the Barmakids, we find that most of the families mentioned are of local provenance, many of them from Quhistan not far from Khwaf. What we have is a picture of intermarriage among families of regional prominence in a number of professions, from local rulers and amirs to *'ulama'* and Sufis. For any ambitious man, such connections would offer a broad range of careers and connections among which to choose.

5 Conclusion

As I have shown there is evidence of elite Iranian families and individuals prominent in several professions, and of the presence of provincial armies in which Iranian personnel made up a significant part of recruits and command. When we allow for the bias of the sources, we should conclude that the examples we know of are a small proportion of those that existed. Therefore, it seems likely that many elite landholding families in Iran were trained and active in more than one sphere and served their rulers in more than one capacity. If we accept this, we should change our view of Iranian society and government in several ways. For one thing we need to consider the likelihood that the difference between the Iranian and the Turco-Mongolian elites was not quite as stark as it has been portrayed and that Iranians were not without a living martial tradition. This conclusion leads to the question of military education.

62 Isfizārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, I, pp.200–201, 215.

63 Isfizārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, I, pp. 217, 231.

64 Isfizārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, I, pp. 216–217.

Historians have long noted that Iranian viziers sometimes led troops in battle. That makes sense. Since at least part of the *dīwān* accompanied the ruler on campaign, it was common for viziers to be present in the army camp. Presence does not in itself indicate an active military role, and for the Timurid period at least, the level of actual military activity of the viziers seems to have varied considerably. The historian Abū Bakr Ṭīhrānī Isfahānī (d. after 1481/2), active in the later Timurid period, gives us some details of his career; he states that he drafted several important documents and portrays himself as serving as mediator and influencing the council of amirs, but gives no indication that he participated in battle.⁶⁵ For most viziers we have no information about military command.

It is clear however that a number of viziers were active in battle and some appointed to significant command; three, Jalāl Islām, Malik Ḥusayn Simnānī, and Ḥāfiẓ Rāzī, have been discussed above. Jalāl Islām, having been denounced for irregularities in the *dīwān*, was then appointed to lead the Tajik armies. It is interesting to find a similar incident later, when Sulṭān Abū Saʿīd, acting on denunciations, dismissed his favored vizier, Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Sayyidi Aḥmad Shīrāzī, then later recalled him and sent him to take Isfahan from Jahānshāh Qaraqoyunlu, which he did successfully.⁶⁶ The important commands held by these and some other viziers required significant military skills. The size of the commands that these men held suggest that they were mounted and probably trained also in mounted archery, a difficult art. They also had to know enough about combat to manage troops. The expertise required for such activity could not be acquired quickly and probably did not come only after they had been appointed to office. It seems likely that the viziers appointed to such commands were those who were known to have significant training and experience already, probably from their youth.

While the military role of some viziers is well known, there has been less discussion of such activity on the part of the *ʿulamaʿ*, and particularly of the *qāḍī*. However, the military activity of the Simnānī *qāḍīs* and those of Jūzjānī's family is not a phenomenon limited to the Mongol period. As I indicated earlier, it is clear that in many, perhaps in most cities, while the defense of the citadel was the task of the garrison forces commanded by the *darughā* or the governor, the walls and gates of the rest of the city were defended by the population, usually under the command of the *qāḍī*.⁶⁷ In some cases the *qāḍī* and civilian population operated under the supervision of the governor, but this was not

65 Ṭīhrānī, *Diyārbakriyya*, pp. vii–xv, 290–293, 325, 343–346.

66 Khwāndamīr, *Dastūr*, pp. 367–369.

67 See footnote 4 above.

always the case. It is useful to remember that sieges of the major cities were not an uncommon occurrence; the death of many, perhaps most, rulers ushered in a period of struggle lasting often several years. During this period major cities faced successive armies and needed to decide whether or not to submit, and, if they did not submit, had to organize a defense. It appears then that the defense of the city was a part of the chief *qāḍī*'s duties, and it was something he could expect to do during the course of his career. The defense of a large city was a complex operation, requiring an understanding of the city's fortifications and also of the tactics and equipment of the army standing outside. It seems unlikely that this task would be entrusted to someone whose only qualification was religious and social authority.

If military activity was part of the lives of many *qāḍīs*, we must consider what sort of training it required and when that would have been received. We know that archery was an art practiced by some of the Iranian population and was part of the *futuwwa* discipline that may well have been central to the defenders of cities. We should not be surprised then when we find two people with the title *Mawlānā*, suggesting religious learning, mentioned as crucial defenders of the Samarqand in a time of siege; we also find a *mawlānā* named elsewhere as a fortress keeper.⁶⁸ While the skills needed to defend the city from within may have been limited to archery and paramilitary skills, it was not infrequent for city troops to make forays outside the city against the besieging army. We see this happening for instance in Isfahan, at the beginning of Shāhrukh's reign, under the leadership of Qāḍī Aḥmad Ṣā'īdī.⁶⁹ If city troops were competent to engage an army of Turco-Mongolian troops, they must have been at least partially mounted and certainly competently led. Here again, long-term military training seems likely and would probably have begun early, within the circle of the family.

As with viziers, it is probable that *qāḍīs* and city populations varied in military expertise. Qāḍī Aḥmad Ṣā'īdī belonged to a family which had long held the judgeship of Isfahan, and had held Isfahan and its region as an autonomous realm for some time during the late Seljukid period.⁷⁰ The *qāḍīs* of Jūzjānī's mother's family also stood out for military activity. Some cities sent troops out to fight in the field, while others defended exclusively from within. We should recognize that a proportion of both '*ulama*' and bureaucrats probably had significant military training, and used it as a part of their professional duties.

68 Manz, "Nomad and Settled", p. 441; Tīhrānī, *Diyārbakriyya*, p. 323.

69 Manz, "Nomad and Settled", pp. 443–444.

70 Durand-Guédy, *Iranian Elites*, pp. 230–242, 281–297.

A second conclusion to draw from the material presented above is that we need to look beyond the major cities in delineating the relationship between state and society. At the higher levels of administration, the dynastic and provincial capitals were undoubtedly the most prominent interface. In smaller cities and the countryside likewise Iranian elites were more than civilian subjects or mediators between a local client population and a foreign government.

Scholars have usually seen the important role of local actors in the context of the limited reach of the central government. Certainly it is clear that in times of disorder at the center, local elites were quick to take advantage and carve out autonomous spheres. However, this was not their only importance in the political arena. It is possible to look at the situation also in a different light. Where government could not fully control local populations, it still could bring elites into its sphere by offering advantages to connection with a higher power. Provincial landowning families lived in a competitive world and could profit from government service in different ways. They might serve in provincial armies, gaining booty, strengthening their retinues, and thus enhancing also their local power. Service in either provincial or central *dīwāns* could also bring wealth which translated into greater local power. In Khwaf and Simnan government officials sometimes invested their new wealth in their home regions, strengthening both the local society and their position within it. A family could continue to prosper through turns of fortune by adjusting the professions of its members and by marrying into families with other useful skills or connections.

We should not see the Iranian elite as civilians defenseless against the depredations of the government and its armies; many were part both of that government and of those armies. The *darughas* stationed with a small number of troops in towns, forts and villages were often acting in concert with local power holders, in both the military and the civilian spheres. Thus despite their foreign origin, the Timurids and other Turco-Mongolian dynasties were probably not a distant and alien presence for many of their subjects. The Iranian elite were not equal to their Turco-Mongolian rulers, but they were politically active and connected to the central state at many different levels and venues, from the chancellery to the army, and from provincial capitals to townships and mountain fortresses.

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The Judges of Mecca and Mamluk Hegemony

John L. Meloy

1 Introduction

In his chronicle of the decades around the turn of the tenth/sixteenth century, the Meccan historian ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn Fahd recorded an anecdote in which two judges, the Ḥanbalī and Ḥanafī judges of Mecca, confronted a *mamlūk* amir, the famous Azbak al-Zāhirī, who was involved in a legal dispute over property in the Holy City.¹ The judges accused Azbak of accepting a bribe to protect a claimant to the property and rebuked him: “Isn’t it enough that you ruined Egypt and so now you come to ruin Mecca also?”² By this time, in 902 AH/1497, the Cairo Sultanate, of course, had had a long history in Mecca, and one would think that someone there would have thought, long before this moment, to comment on how the Sultanate’s agents had affected the Hijaz. To me, this anecdote alludes to the implications of Cairo’s influence in, rather than its direct control over, the Hijaz—an influence that ran deeper than the distant integration of political and fiscal offices in Mecca and Jedda into the Sultanate. After all, Azbak’s reputation rather than the authority of his office was at play here. My goal in this chapter is to look beyond the establishment of these offices and what I have called elsewhere the “unruly” relationship between the sharifs and the sultan, in an effort to understand how the Cairo Sultanate perceived the problem of control in a periphery that, although physically very remote, was also symbolically very central to the state’s viability.³ Here I will address the nature of the Sultanate’s ideological domination and the extent to which it was achieved through hegemony—that is, dominance by means of the consent of the ruled, rather than by force⁴—of the Hijaz, and especially of Mecca. I will argue that this entailed the centripetal transformation of a dis-

1 On Azbak, see Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya*.

2 ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh al-Qirā*, 2: 981–982; 9 Jumādā II 902 AH (12 February 1497).

3 Meloy, *Imperial Power*.

4 Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, passim. I have found useful discussions in: Bates, “Gramsci and the Idea of Hegemony”, e.g., “political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and the popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (p. 352); and Williams, “The Concept of ‘Egemonia’”, 586–589.

tant elite of jurists into stakeholders of the Sultanate, bringing the region more firmly into Cairo's sphere of ideological control.

2 Cairo and Mecca

The sharifs of Mecca and the sultans of Cairo had a relationship that operated on a number of occasionally intersecting political dimensions—rhetorical, administrative, and economic—that enhanced Cairo's hegemonic hold over Mecca. Because of the mutual dependence of Cairo and Mecca, the relationships were subject to change and negotiation.⁵ Of course, underlying this interdependence was Mecca's reliance on Egypt as a source for foodstuffs to maintain the populace of the Holy City, the ranks of which were swelled by the many pious sojourners who resided there often for long periods of time, and the even more numerous pilgrims who visited annually.⁶

The ideological claims of the Sultanate in Cairo are well known but it may be useful to sketch some of these features here since they form the background for later developments.⁷ Mecca became an object of political competition after the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate at the hands of the Mongols in 1258 when the sultans of Egypt and Syria competed for influence in Mecca with the Rasulid sultans of Yemen and with the Ilkhans after their conversion. Cairo ultimately prevailed in these contests. The rhetorical claim of the Cairo sultans over the Hijaz dates back to the time of the Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars (r. 658–76 AH /1260–76), who claimed to be the protector of the two holy sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina, an arrangement formalized in a treaty between Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (r. 678–89 AH /1279–90) and Sharif Muḥammad Abū Numayy (r. 652–701 AH /1254–1301) of Mecca in 681 AH/1282,⁸ and continued by Baybars's successors in Cairo until the end of the regime. This claim was expressed through a number of political rituals in Mecca: the invocation of the name of the Cairo sultan at the call to prayer and before the congregational sermon in the Ḥarām Mosque in Mecca; the use of the title "Servitor of the Two Noble Sanctuaries";⁹ which asserted the sultan's role as preeminent Muslim

5 Meloy, *Imperial Power*. See also, for example, Barkey, *Empire of Difference*.

6 Mortel, "Maṣādir al-Tamwīn", 193–219. On provisioning Mecca, also helpful is Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans*, 164–166.

7 Jomier, *Le Maḥmal*; idem, "Aspects politiques et religieux", 391–401.

8 Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, *Tashrif al-Ayyām*, 18–19; Ibn al-Furat, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, 7:247–248; see also Melville, "Elephant", 197–214, esp. 198.

9 Combe, ed., *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, 12:56–57, no. 4476, in Damascus dated 659/1261, and 12:103, no. 4554, in Kara (Qara ?) dated 664/1266.

ruler; the annual dispatch of the cloth covering for the Ka'ba in Mecca; and the annual dispatch of the sultan's ceremonial palanquin, which represented the personage of the sultan.¹⁰

Cairo's dominance was also asserted administratively through the appointment of the sharifs as amirs in the Sultanate's administrative apparatus. Thus, in principle, the sharifs were subordinate to the sultans; however, this symbolic dominance did not necessarily give the Cairo sultans a free hand in the Hijaz. It was very much in the interests of the Cairo sultans to rule indirectly through the sharifs, whose lineage from the Prophet lent them an unassailable prestige and whose sway over local groups was often, but not always, an effective means to ensure free passage through the Hijaz for the pilgrimage and commerce. Hence the sharifs of Mecca were located at a nexus of local and interregional political and economic relationships which enabled them to serve as brokers whom the Cairo sultans could not do without. Noteworthy is the one instance, in 826 AH/1423, in which the Cairo sultans replaced a ruling sharif, Ḥasan ibn 'Ajlān (r. 797–829 AH/1395–1426, with two interruptions), with an officer of the Sultanate, Qurqmās—not even ruling alone but appointed jointly with another sharif, 'Alī ibn 'Inān, a cousin of Ḥasan—whose joint appointment ended scarcely a year later with Ḥasan's re-instatement.¹¹ At the same time, the sharifs did not have an entirely free hand in the Hijaz since the ruling sharif's position vis-à-vis local opponents—most often those claiming the sharifal succession—was enhanced by a political connection to Cairo. The combination of all these factors made for a rather contentious political system, most often characterized in Cairo as one of *fitna*.¹²

The two cities were also bound together as nodes in a network of long-distance trade that connected the continents, but their economic relationship was concretized fiscally when Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbāy (r. 825–41 AH/1422–38) set up a customs collection station in Jedda and established, at least for a time, increasingly tighter controls on commerce. Sources composed in Mecca offer more nuance to our understanding of these measures and allow us to appreciate that Mamluk political domination was not quite as relentlessly monolithic, and certainly not as inflexible, as it often appears to be in the official pronouncements of the Cairo Sultanate and in the narrative sources written in the Mamluk metropole.¹³

10 On the *maḥmal*, see Jomier, *Le Maḥmal*; idem, "Le maḥmal du sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri", 183–188; and Meloy, "Celebrating the Mahmal", 404–427.

11 For a detailed account of this episode, see Meloy, *Imperial Power*, 115–125.

12 Meloy, *Imperial Power*, 95, 237.

13 Meloy, "Imperial Strategy", 1–19.

In my previous work, although cognizant of these various dimensions of power, I focused on the dynamic and flexible quality of the Cairo-Mecca relationship, mainly through the process of brokerage; however, the end product was fundamentally an institutional history inasmuch as it explained how the Sharifate limited the Sultanate's power in the Hijaz periphery and how, in turn, the Hijazi socio-political order limited the ruling Sharif's power. Thus the judges' admonition is no less unsettling to me, since it is a reminder to consider both sides of Hodgson's *a'yān-amīr* system of social power (that is, the condominium of local civilian and military elites who, in the wake of centralized imperial power, dominated the Islamic lands in the later Middle Ages) in order to appreciate fully that influence may be as powerful as direct control and that ideas may rule as effectively as force.¹⁴ Consequently, one wonders what other, perhaps less visible, transformations were going on. Furthermore, although scholarly attention has been given to officials, civilian and otherwise, in the Hijaz,¹⁵ the judges' rebuke also serves as a pointed reminder that their story—not only as representatives, but also situated at the top of the civilian elite in a position perhaps parallel to Gramsci's intellectuals¹⁶—has not yet been told. In order to attempt to rectify this situation, in this chapter I examine a community of judges and their role in the extension of Cairo's hegemony in Mecca, an effort that will take us back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This project provides an essential backdrop for understanding Mamluk state expansion in the Hijaz in the fifteenth century, and in particular the incorporation of elite groups in that region into the domain of the Cairo Sultanate, and for representing other features of the Mamlukization of the Hijaz—although ones that the two judges did not necessarily have in mind when they admonished amir Azbak.

3 Judges in Mecca in the Fourteenth Century

To get immediately to the point, in addition to the dimensions of political engagement briefly outlined above, in the first half of the fourteenth century we see another manifestation of the Cairo Sultanate's hegemony in the Hijaz: the cooptation of judicial appointments which occurred during the principal reign

14 Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2: 64–69; Bates, “Gramsci”, 351.

15 Mortel, “Aspects of Mamluk Relations”, 1–13; idem, “The Decline of Mamluk Civil Bureaucracy”, 173–188; idem, “Grand Dawadar”, 437–456; idem, “The Mercantile Community”, 15–35; Wing, “Indian Ocean Trade and Sultanlic Authority”, 55–75.

16 Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo*, 227–228; Williams, “Gramsci's Concept”, 587.

of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 709–41 AH/1310–41). In short, this was an effective means by which Cairo could extend its control through elite members of the civilian establishment in Mecca. My main source here is the biographical dictionary of Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī (d. 832 AH/1429), scion of a Meccan family who served as a Mālikī chief judge in the Holy City, supplemented by the works of Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd (d. 885 AH/1480) and Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH/1497).¹⁷ Al-Fāsī compiled biographies of over three thousand individuals, about 98 of whom are identified as judges. The biographies that date to the 150 years or so before his death are quite detailed and we can gather information about the ties that bound together the community of judges who served in Mecca, at least the Sunni ones, with whom the Cairo Sultanate was concerned. Al-Fāsī does not always supply details about appointments, but we can reconstruct the succession of those who served as the principal judge of Mecca—always of the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*—from the end of the seventh AH/thirteenth century until his time. Eight men held the position of chief judge in Mecca from 676 AH/1277–78 through to the first decade of the ninth AH/fifteenth century, when the judicial hierarchy was modified, a subject to discuss below (see Table 7.1, judges #2–#9). A number of points are noteworthy about those who served in the fourteenth century.

First, the situation with judges in Mecca was very similar to that in the metropolitan centers of contemporary Egypt and Syria, where particular families (like the Bulqīnīs in Cairo and the Banū Jamāʿa in Cairo and Damascus) dominated judicial positions.¹⁸ In Mecca also, local families dominated the judiciary. Prior to the mid-seventh AH/thirteenth century, judicial positions were dominated by other prominent families, such as the Shaybānī family, who subsequently became interrelated with the Ṭabarīs, so that the members often used both *nisbas* (as with ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Yaḥyā, judge #0 in Table 7.1).¹⁹ After the mid-seventh AH/thirteenth century, judicial positions in Mecca were dominated mainly by three families who intermarried. Most of the judges in the fourteenth century were from the al-Ṭabarī and the al-Nuwayrī families. In addition, during this time the Ibn Zahrā family also filled judicial positions along with a handful of others. In his study of the chief judges in Egypt, Joseph Escovitz designated four factors that played a role in judicial appointments: merit, patronage, nepotism, and succession through deputyships (*nāʾib*

17 Al-Fāsī, *al-ʿIqd*; Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *al-Durr al-Kamīn*; idem, *Itḥāf al-Warā*; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Dawʿ al-Lāmiʿ*.

18 On the Bulqīnīs, see Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 232–240; on the Banū Jamāʿa, see Salibi, “The Banū Jamāʿa”, 97–109.

19 Bauden, “Les Tabariyya”, 253–266.

TABLE 7.1 Chief judges of Mecca from the mid-seventh AH/thirteenth century to the beginning of the ninth AH/fifteenth century with Hijri years of service

0.	622–645: ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Yahyā al-Shaybānī al-Ṭabarī, Kamāl al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad.
1.	645–673: ‘Imrān ibn Thābit ibn Khālid al-Fihri, Bahā’ al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad.
2.	673–675, 676–ca. 695: Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarī, Jamāl al-Dīn.
3.	ca. 695–730: Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī, Najm al-Dīn Abū Ḥāmid.
4.	730–760: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl.
5.	760–763: Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥarazī, Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-Yaman.
6.	763–786: Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī, Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl.
7.	786–788: Aḥmad ibn Ḥāhira Ibn Ḥāhira, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-‘Abbās.
8.	788–799: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Nuwayrī, Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū al-Barakāt.
9.	799–806: Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī, ‘Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Mafākhir.

appointments).²⁰ While he determined that patronage played the largest role in appointments, he observed that nepotism and deputy succession were often combined and that the two factors together played the largest role. This was the situation that obtained in Mecca. Of course, these individuals were learned men; in the course of their early careers, they had travelled widely in pursuit of their studies: Medina, Cairo, Damascus, and Yemen figure most prominently as destinations. Nevertheless, personal connections clearly played a major role in their appointments. Of the eight chief judges, mentioned above, four were sons or grandsons of judicial predecessors and there were three connections to other judges through marriage (see Chart 7.1). Four individuals, at least, had served with predecessors as deputies (one of these did so with two predecessors), which parallels the pattern observed by Petry in Cairo,²¹ and at least four had studied with individuals who were judges in Mecca (see Chart 7.2).

²⁰ Escovitz, “Patterns of Appointment”, 147–168.

²¹ Petry, *Civilian Elite*, 228–229, 230.

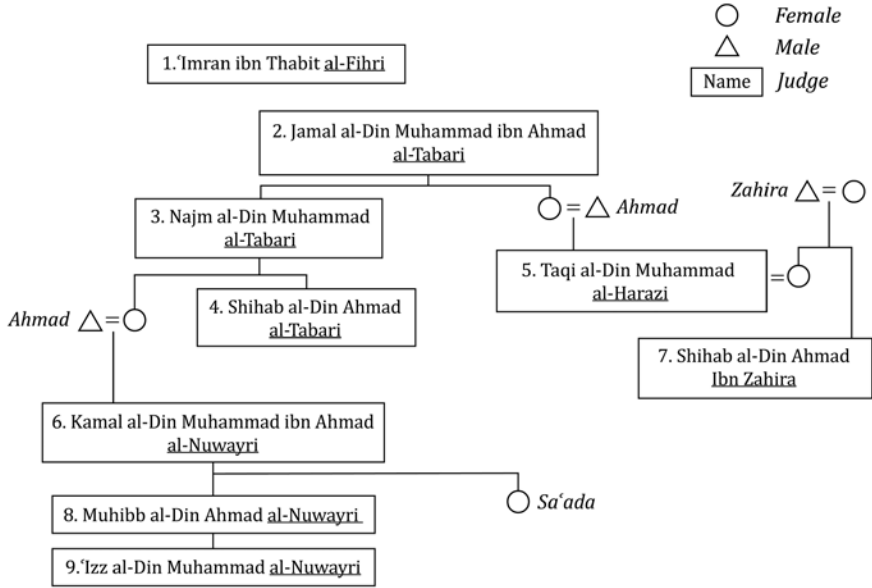


CHART 7.1 Chief judges of Mecca: Kinship

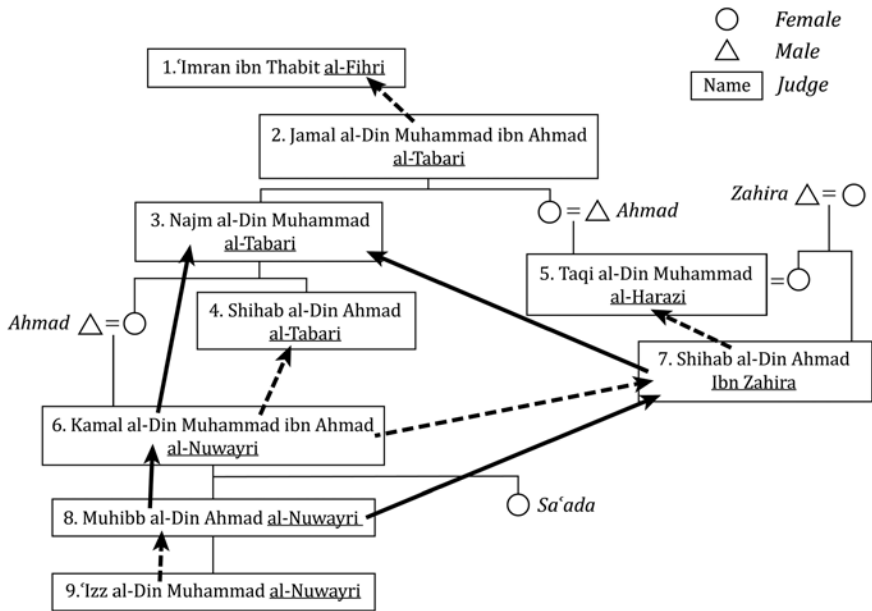


CHART 7.2 Chief judges of Mecca: Student-Teacher relationships (indicated with solid arrow) and service as deputy judge (indicated with dashed arrow)

Second, it is important to note that up until the 730s AH/1330s the Rasulid sultans appointed the judges of Mecca. This was in spite of the claims of the earliest Cairo sultans to be the servitors of the Holy Cities. The sharif of Mecca, at least in one instance to be noted below, appointed a judge as well. There were evidently Zaydī judges, appointed by the Zaydī imam in Yemen, but we have little information: al-Fāsī mentions briefly one Zaydī judge from Yanbu‘, Aḥmad ibn Rashīd al-Yanbu‘ī, who performed the pilgrimage in 819 AH/1416. Of course, as one would expect, al-Fāsī was chiefly concerned with Sunni judges; more information on the Zaydī judges would help us round out the picture. An interesting case is that of Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī (Chart 7.2, no. 2), who served as deputy to ‘Imrān ibn Thābit al-Fihri (no. 1), and then, after being appointed as judge, initiated a string of subsequent generations—either direct descendants or descendants through marriage—to hold the position. Al-Fāsī tells us that Jamāl al-Dīn voluntarily stepped down from the position (it is not explained why) in 675 AH/1276–77, but that he was reappointed the following year by the Rasulid sultan, al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf (r. 647–94 AH/1250–95), whereupon the judge duly resumed his responsibilities. However, the watershed moment in judicial appointments seems to have occurred with Jamāl al-Dīn’s grandson, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad al-Ṭabarī (Chart 7.2, no. 4), who held the position from 730–60 AH/1330–60. He was initially appointed by the Meccan sharif, ‘Uṭayfa ibn Abī Numayy, and the appointment was confirmed later in the same year by the Rasulid sultan al-Mujāhid ‘Alī (r. 721–64 AH/1321–63). Two years later, in 732 AH/1332, Shihāb al-Dīn received yet a third appointment as judge from the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, when the sultan performed the pilgrimage.

Given that the biographical and chronicle sources do not provide information to explain the policy behind the Cairo Sultanate’s appointments, we can only draw some conclusions from the circumstantial evidence of the political context. The arrogation of judicial appointments occurred at the height of a competition for influence over the holy cities that was being waged between al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and his political rivals, the Rasulids in Yemen and the Ilkhanids in Iran and Iraq. While the Rasulids had enjoyed considerable influence in the Hijaz, by the beginning of the fourteenth century they posed little military threat to Mecca, and no ideological claim over it, although the Yemeni sultans did try to extend their influence, by building institutions there and performing the pilgrimage, as will be noted below. The Ilkhans, however, directed a considerable amount of military and political capital toward the holy cities during the reigns of Muḥammad Khudābanda Öljeytü (r. 703–16 AH/1304–16) and Abū Sa‘īd (r. 716–36 AH/1316–35), both converts to Islam. Initially, this came about as political opportunity in the succession disputes that arose after

the death of Sharif Abū Numayy (d. 701 AH/1301), which eventually led to an Ilkhanid military expedition in 716 AH/1316 in alliance with the Sharif Ḥumayḍa ibn Abī Numayy. The putative objective of this force, at least according to Sunni readings of the mission, was to exhume the bodies of the Caliphs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar from their graves in Medina and banish them from the Prophet's mosque in order to signal Öljeytū's rejection of their credibility as successors to the Prophet.²² However, upon receiving news of the death of Öljeytū (d. 716 AH/1316), the mission dissolved on its way to the Hijaz. Nevertheless, Sharif Ḥumayḍa, together with the remnants of the Ilkhanid expedition, managed to enter Mecca after the departure of the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan, expelling his brother and rival Sharif Rumaytha ibn Abī Numayy, at the time the ruling sharif, from the city. They had the *khutba* given in the name of Öljeytū's successor, Abū Saʿīd, in Ṣafar 718 AH/April 1318.²³ Ḥumayḍa's hold on the city was short-lived, although the Cairo Sultanate's interests there were not yet secure.

The Ilkhans continued to pursue their interests in Mecca, although Abū Saʿīd adopted an approach less antagonistic than his predecessor's had been. In 723 AH/1323, the two sides established a peace treaty although Abū Saʿīd continued to try to boost his influence in Mecca through public works. For the pilgrimage of 730 AH/1330, the Ilkhan sought to impress the faithful by sending his ceremonial palanquin (*maḥmal*) on the back of an elephant. It was not a success: the poor animal died on the return journey and the one-upmanship only served to heighten tensions in Mecca, prompting al-Nāṣir Muḥammad to respond immediately with a military expedition in Ṣafar 731 AH/November 1331. The next year, as mentioned above, he himself performed the pilgrimage (his third) during which he also issued the appointment of the Shāfiʿī judge, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad al-Ṭabarī, as mentioned above.

After the appointment of Shihāb al-Dīn, in the Meccan sources, there are no more reports of Yemeni judicial appointments, only Egyptian ones. Moreover, we also read of instances where the judges of Mecca worked in concert with the Cairo sultan. For example, when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad performed the pilgrimage, the judge Shihāb al-Dīn had the opportunity to ask the sultan about the validity of certain orders that were purportedly issued by his chancery. The sultan showed the judge a "mark" (*amāra*) that he could use to distinguish the authentic decrees, and Shihāb al-Dīn was consequently able to tear up forty-some forged documents. Judge Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī (Chart 7.2, no. 6), who had been Shihāb al-Dīn's deputy, prevented a powerful merchant, Zakī al-Dīn al-Kharrūbī, from paving the courtyard of the principal

22 Broadbridge, *Kinship and Ideology*, 128; Melville, "Elephant", 200–201.

23 Melville, "Elephant", 201.

mosque in Mecca, al-Masjid al-Harām, saying that the only person with the authority to undertake this act was the sultan of Egypt.²⁴ Al-Kharrūbī had real political clout: he was the commercial agent of the sultan and had clout with the Rasulid sultan al-Afḍal al-‘Abbās (r. 764–78 AH/1363–77) due to his commercial interests in the Kārimī trade in luxury goods from south Asia. Kamāl al-Dīn paid dearly for crossing al-Kharrūbī. Kamāl al-Dīn was vulnerable to al-Kharrūbī’s influential connections since the judge held concurrent appointments as the Shāfi‘ī professor in three prominent madrasas founded by Rasulid sultans: the Manṣūriyya (founded 641 AH/1243–44), the Mujāhidiyya (founded 739 AH/1338–39), and the Afḍaliyya (founded 768 AH/1366–67). Al-Kharrūbī, in retaliation for the judge’s rejection of his pious generosity, used his influence with the Rasulid sultan to have Kamāl al-Dīn dismissed from all three positions, by this time perhaps the only remaining domain of Yemeni influence in Mecca.²⁵

Further developments occurred in the judicial hierarchy in the fifteenth century that show the imprint of Cairo’s hegemony—these will be examined in the penultimate section of this chapter. However, in order to focus on the nature of Cairo’s hegemonic control over Mecca, it is important to first consider the sectarian disposition of the sharifs in the fourteenth century, which will be addressed in the following section. For now, we can conclude that the Sunni judges of Mecca were members of a discrete and clearly identifiable local social elite who were interrelated by blood and marriage ties and by their education and judicial training, and who, although they were born and bred in the Hijaz, were well travelled as a result of their cosmopolitan education. When al-Nāṣir Muḥammad arrogated to himself the appointment of judges in Mecca, he not only absorbed into his state apparatus individuals who held prestige and authority and who worked in concert with his interests, but he also integrated into his state an entire regional social elite through their monopoly of Sunni *fiqh*: in effect, we see here the cooptation of an elite sector of society in Mecca. Other positions in the Meccan religious establishment as well as in other cities in the Hijaz need to be investigated as well, but it would appear to be a safe hypothesis that they were also similarly integrated.

4 The Sharifs and Conversion: Judges as Agents of Hegemony

The ideological claims of the Cairo sultans are often seen in the context of Cairo’s competition with other great powers of the Islamic world: from India,

24 On al-Kharrūbī, see Wiet, “Marchands d’épice”, 114.

25 Al-Fāsī, *Iqd* 1: 300–307, no. 29.

to Iran, to Yemen and North Africa. However, the sharifs of Mecca themselves, who followed Zaydī Shiite Islam, provided potential sectarian competition to the Sunni rulers of Egypt and Syria and their judges. The violence that the Cairo sultans inflicted on members of the Zaydī community in the Hijaz indicates that they considered this such a serious issue that they effectively expunged Zaydism from the local political leadership on Mecca, as Richard Mortel has argued.²⁶ As I mentioned earlier, the Banū Ḥasan, who claimed descent from the son of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, ruled as sharifs of Mecca from the middle of the fourth/tenth century. They continued to rule in the Hijaz through the Ottoman period until the third decade of the twentieth century. However, the Sunni character of this lineage was a result of Cairo’s imperial projection in the fourteenth century. I mentioned at the outset the first sharif of Mecca who had to deal with Cairo’s claims on Mecca initiated by sultan al-Ẓāhir Baybars: Sharif Muḥammad Abū Numayy. Muḥammad Abū Numayy, like his Banū Ḥasan forebears, was an ardent Zaydī, ensuring the practice of Zaydī rituals in the Great Mosque: for example, in the call to prayer, the Shi‘i formula was used and, at the congregational prayer on Fridays, the Zaydis followed their practice of four *rak‘as* of prayer rather than the Sunni tradition of two *rak‘as*. Sharif Abū Numayy was highly admired for his political prowess with regard to his ability to fend off the ambitions of the sultans of Cairo and the Rasulids despite their pretensions to be the protectors of the two sanctuaries. Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī later wrote glowingly, tinged nevertheless with sectarian disapproval, of Sharif Abū Numayy that “were it not for his *madhhab*, he would have been [a] suitable [choice] for the Caliphate; [but] he was a Zaydī, as were his relatives.”²⁷

Mubārak ibn ‘Uṭayfa, himself of sharifian lineage, was reported by Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umarī (d. 749 AH/1349) to have said about the sharifs of Mecca that they “profess their obedience for the Imam (the Zaydī imam of Yemen) and consider themselves his deputies. They are cautious with the ruler of Egypt out of fear and for the *iqṭā‘* and with the ruler of Yemen for [the possibility] of bypassing them so that the *Kārim* [trade] continues [to come to Mecca] and [to obtain its] benefits.”²⁸ Al-Qalqāshandī (d. 821 AH/1418), writing at the turn of the fifteenth century, stated categorically in his chancery manual that the Banū Ḥasan of Mecca and Yanbu‘ were Zaydis.²⁹ However, the narrative sources would suggest that al-Qalqāshandī’s information, at least about the sharifs of Mecca, was outdated—or perhaps there were lingering suspicions in Cairo of

26 For a detailed overview of the sharifs and religion, see Mortel, “Zaydi Shi‘ism”, 455–472. On Mecca during this period, see Ota, “The Meccan Sharifate”, 1–20.

27 al-Fāsī, *Iqd*, 1: 467, no. 144; cf. Mortel, “Zaydi Shi‘ism”, 461–462.

28 Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umarī, *al-Ta‘rīf*, 203.

29 Mortel, “Zaydi Shi‘ism”, 467–468.

the sharifs' convictions. Over the course of the fourteenth century, the sultan's officers used strong arm tactics and Cairo-appointed judges used aggressive moral pressure to drive Zaydism out of Mecca.

The politics of Mecca in the fourteenth century were as unruly as in the fifteenth century. In both centuries, the Cairo Sultanate added fuel to the fire of Sharifian rivalries. However, while Cairo's interests in the fifteenth century were driven by commercial concerns, in the fourteenth century, its interests were driven by competition with other Islamic powers, especially the Ilkhans, but also the Rasulids. The political history of the Hijaz in the first four decades of the fourteenth century was dominated by the rivalry of the four sons of Sharif Muḥammad Abū Numayy, that led, in 714 AH/1315, to the death of his son Abū al-Ghayth upon the orders of his brother Ḥumayda, and a few years later, in 720 AH/1320, to the murder of Ḥumayda. Sharifs Rumaytha and 'Uṭayfa continued to struggle over Mecca, and the former emerged as the victor.³⁰ Just as they did in the fifteenth century, the Cairo sultans meddled in politics by using the force provided by the official pilgrimage caravan, led each year by the commander of the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan (*amīr al-hajj*) and his military escort. During his political career, Rumaytha was removed from power and reinstated on four occasions. We see similar patterns of re-instatement over the following century with Rumaytha's son 'Ajlān, his grandson Ḥasan, and his great-grandson, Barakāt.³¹ The rulers of Cairo found that they had no other political options to sustain stability.

The narrative sources give occasional reports about Cairo's anti-Zaydi activities, which, taken in sum, may represent a sustained policy to diminish the prominence of Zaydism in the Hijaz or, at least, among the region's political elite. Cairo's pressure on the Zaydīs first occurred in 726 AH/1326 when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad sent a decree to 'Uṭayfa ibn Abī Numayy, who was ruling sharif at the time, to forbid the Zaydī imam from leading prayers in the Masjid al-Ḥarām.³² This decree, however, seems not to have been enforced, but the agents of the Sultanate subsequently became more aggressive. The next report comes twenty years later, in 746 AH/1346, when Rumaytha died, to be succeeded initially by his son 'Ajlān, who occasionally had to compete for the paramount position with his brothers, Sanad, Thaḡaba, and Muḡhāmīs. The significant point here is that at Rumaytha's funeral the leader of the Zaydī community in Mecca, Ibn al-Shuḡayf, stepped forward to lead the prayer, but he was prevented from doing so by the Shāfi'ī chief judge, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī (who, as

30 Mortel, *al-Aḥwāl*, 65–90.

31 Meloy, *Imperial Power*, 102–112, 142–162.

32 Al-Fāsī, *Iqd*, 6: 98, no. 2003.

noted earlier, was appointed by Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad), who went on to lead the service.³³

Less than a decade later, in 754 AH/1353–54, during the brief reign of al-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ (r. 752–5 AH/1351–4), the sultan's agents took more severe measures to prevent the practice of Zaydism in Mecca. The Cairo-based Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'taḍid (r. 753–63 AH/1352–62) and the Shāfi'ī chief judge of Cairo, 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Jamā'a, performed the pilgrimage that year along with an unusually large number of prominent amirs.³⁴ The goals of this delegation were twofold: to establish Sunnism at the expense of Zaydism and to counter Yemeni ambitions in Mecca. In 751 AH/1351, the Rasulid al-Mujāhid 'Alī performed the pilgrimage, evidently at the encouragement of Thaqaba, supported by his brothers Sanad and Muḡhāmis, who hoped that with the Yemeni ruler's assistance they could drive their brother 'Ajlān out of Mecca. The plot failed, the conspiring brothers fled to the south, and the Yemeni sultan was captured by the agents of Cairo but eventually released.³⁵ While these sharifian intrigues were going on, the Egyptian agents continued their persecution of Zaydīs in Mecca. The Zaydī imam in Mecca, Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn Aḡmad al-Yamanī, was beaten and imprisoned for refusing to renounce his faith. Until this time, Abū al-Qāsim had held a prominent role in the Masjid al-Ḥarām, where he led his community in prayer and had a specially designated pulpit. He subsequently managed to escape the city; however, his associate, the Zaydī muezzin, was not as fortunate since the Egyptian pilgrimage commander had him beaten to death.³⁶ 'Izz al-Dīn ibn Jamā'a remained in Mecca for some months after the pilgrimage and then the following Ramaḡān convened a meeting with the leader of the Zaydīs, Ibn al-Shuḡayf—this is the man who was prevented from leading the prayers at the funeral of Sharif Rumaytha about a decade before. Ibn Jamā'a persuaded him “to renounce, [in writing,] before God most high, the creed of the Zaydī, Imamī, and other heretics” (*i'tiqād ahl al-bida' al-zaydiyya al-imamiyya wa-ghayrihā*). Al-Fāsī noted candidly that Ibn al-Shuḡayf acquiesced because he was afraid that he would meet the same fate the muezzin had met only a few months before.³⁷

33 Al-Fāsī, *Iqd* 3: 161–166, no. 647; 4: 417, no. 1196.

34 Najm al-Dīn Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-Warā* 3: 261; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk*, 2: 903; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Dhayl al-Tāmm*, 1: 134; on Ibn Jamā'a, see Salibi, “Banu Jamā'a”, 101–102.

35 For details and sources on this, see Mortel, *al-Aḡwāl*, 96–97; De Gaury, *The Rulers of Mecca*, 101.

36 Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-Warā*, 3: 260–262; Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk*, 2: 904.

37 Al-Fāsī, *Iqd*, 8: 89–90, no. 2975; Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-Warā* 3: 265. Note that Mortel says that al-Fāsī remarked that Ibn al-Shuḡayf agreed upon his own volition (Mortel, “Zaydī

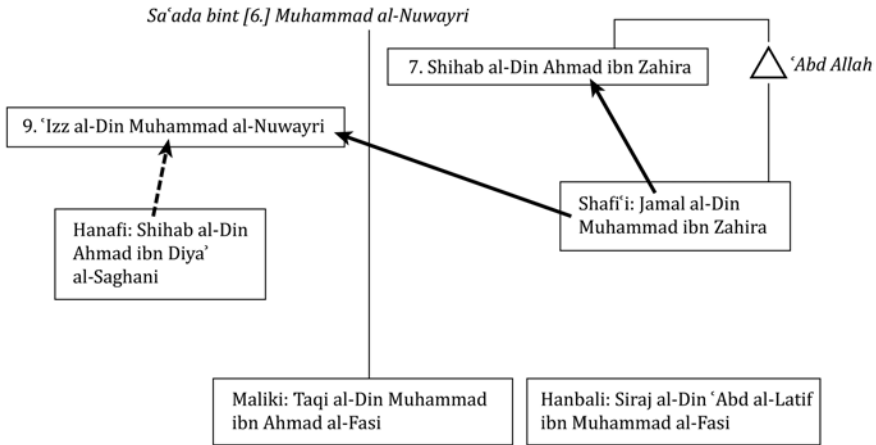


CHART 7.3 The first chief judges of Mecca for the four Sunni schools of law

Al-Fāsī wrote that when ‘Ajlān was on his deathbed in 777 AH/1375 he requested that the Sunni judge of Mecca, Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad al-Nuwayrī, the maternal grandfather of al-Fāsī (Chart 7.2, no. 6; and Chart 7.3) and the judge who was dismissed from professorships in the three Rasulid madrasas, supervise his funeral with the Sunni *fuqahā*, signifying the sharif’s last assertion of Sunnism.³⁸ However, it is noteworthy that the transition from Zaydism to Sunnism among the ruling sharifs may not have been abrupt: even ‘Ajlān, as a Sunni, did not retain his title as the Cairo sultan’s amir of Mecca. He was replaced by his brothers Sanad and Thaqaba, both of whom, we are told by al-Fāsī, adhered to their Zaydism. ‘Ajlān was subsequently re-appointed in 763 AH/1362. Thus the Cairo sultans extended their hegemony in the region through these parallel approaches: carrying out aggressive anti-Zaydī actions and coopting the Sunni judicial community. But their ideological goals were also tempered with pragmatism, so their control of the ruling sharif was more important to them than the ruling sharif’s faith. Finally, while the Cairo Sultanate was ultimately successful in their ideological domination of Mecca, by no means was Zaydism eradicated from the region. Other members of the Banū Ḥasan, like those in Yanbu’, continued to avow their Zaydism but they became increasingly marginalized.³⁹

Shi’ism”, 466, citing Al-Fāsī, *Iqd* 8:89–90) but the evidence for this conclusion is not clear to me.

38 Al-Fāsī, *Iqd* 6: 70, no. 1979.

39 Hurgronje noted that, during his time, “in the environs of Mekka there are still strong remains of that Shi’itism which once contributed to the conquest of western Arabia by the Sherifs, and is now for its reward despised by them”. *Mekka*, 199–200.

‘Ajlān seems to have been pragmatic as well, professing Sunnism in order to win the support of Cairo.⁴⁰ Certainly, he was the last of his generation to rule, and it would seem that with him and his descendants Sunnism was unquestionably established in the Sharifal family. Both ‘Ajlān and his son and principal successor Ḥasan endowed madrasas to teach Shāfi‘ī fiqh in Mecca. ‘Ajlān’s son Ḥasan as well as his sons, Barakāt, ‘Alī, Abū al-Qāsim, and Ibrāhīm, all of whom ruled Mecca into the mid-fifteenth century, all studied *ḥadīth* with Sunni scholars.⁴¹ It must be said that the Sunnism of these men did not ensure political stability, in spite of their effective consent to Cairo’s hegemony over the political leadership of Mecca. Meccan politics continued to be highly contentious due to the political dynamics of tribal society in the Hijaz and, if anything, the contention increased in the first half of the fifteenth century when trade is mentioned more often. However, the sharifs’ acceptance of Sunnism and their efforts to educate their sons accordingly must have facilitated their relations with the Sultanate’s officialdom as well as with the Cairo-appointed chief judges of Mecca.

5 Back to the Judges in the Fifteenth Century

In the fifteenth century, we start to see two more developments. First, we see the judicial hierarchy and its operation conforming to that of the rest of the Cairo Sultanate. Second, we discern connections between judges and sharifs that indicate the comfortable cohabitation of these two local elites. During the reign of the Sultan Faraj ibn Barqūq (r. 801–808 AH/1399–1405), the number of chief judges in Mecca increased fourfold since he took the decision to appoint chief judges of the Sunni madhhabs in Mecca, an arrangement, of course, established by Sultan Baybars in Cairo in the 1260s.⁴² But the local and highly interconnected nature of the Hijazi judicial leadership did not change. The first Shāfi‘ī appointed in this new system (see Chart 7.3) was Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥahira, who had studied with his immediate predecessor, ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Nuwayrī and with Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Ḥahira, his relative, who had preceded ‘Izz al-Dīn as judge.⁴³ In 807 AH/1404–05, the

40 Hurgonje (ibid.) called the sharifs “opportunists in the question of rite”. This seems an unfair judgment on the sharifs in general; however, ‘Ajlān’s actions suggest that he may well qualify.

41 Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *al-Durr al-Kamīn* 1:591, no. 514; 1:647, no. 563; 2:1015, no. 992; 2:1329, no. 1404; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw’ al-Lāmi’* 3:13, no. 50; 3:104, no. 417; 5: 211, no. 709.

42 On this development, see Escovitz, “The Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships”, Jackson, “The Primacy of Politics”, 52–65; and Rapoport, “Legal Disunity”, 210–228.

43 Al-Fāsī, *‘Iqd*, 2: 53–59, no. 213; 1: 371–376, no. 47; 3: 52–53, no. 562.

first Ḥanafī judge, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ṣāghānī, had also served as deputy to ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Nuwayrī.⁴⁴ The first Mālikī judge, Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Fāsī, the author of our main source for the eighth AH/fourteenth century, was the grandson of Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl al-Nuwayrī (Chart 7.2, no. 6; and Chart 7.3).⁴⁵ Two years later, in 809 AH/1406–07, the first Ḥanbalī judge was appointed—Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Abī Fath Muḥammad al-Fāsī, a second cousin of Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī, his Mālikī colleague.⁴⁶

Seemingly in parallel to the appointment of chief judges was the establishment, for the first time in Mecca, of a *madrassa* that taught the four Sunni schools of law. The Banjaliyya Madrasa, also known as the Ghiyāthiyya, was founded in 813 AH/1410 by Ghiyāth al-Dīn A‘zam Shāh (r. 792–813 AH/1390–1410), the sultan of Bengal. Its four professors of the madhhabs were, at least initially, the four chief judges appointed by the sultan in Cairo. It was not unusual for judges to hold teaching positions, as was the case with the chief judges’ illustrious predecessor, Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad al-Nuwayrī (Chart 7.2, no. 6), noted earlier, who held three positions simultaneously. Nothing had changed in this regard and nothing had changed in terms of the network that facilitated appointments to judicial positions. Of course, what is interesting here is the extension of Indian influence into the mix, which, if anything, ended up supporting Cairo’s hegemony; but after all, the Indian regimes often appealed to the Abbasid Caliph in Cairo for recognition.

In addition, just as individuals bought judicial positions in Egypt and Syria, so too did judicial aspirants in Mecca, at least in the fifteenth century when we have evidence for this in local sources, although this didn’t necessarily preclude the necessity of personal connections that ensured succession in judicial appointment. During the time when the Mamluk officer Jānibak al-Zāhirī dominated Mecca in the 860s AH/1465–64, Muḥibb al-Dīn ibn Zāhira was appointed Shāfi‘ī chief judge to succeed his deceased father, after he paid Jānibak 2,500 dinars, in addition to “some books”. The amount appears to have been a bargain compared to the 10,000 dinars for a chief judgeship in Damascus in

44 Al-Fāsī, *Iqd*, 3: 168–170, no. 650.

45 Al-Fāsī, *Iqd*, 1: 331–363, no. 38.

46 Sakhāwī, *al-Daw’ al-Lāmi’* 3: 333–334, no. 923: he was the second cousin of al-Fāsī: “he was the grandson of the paternal uncle of the father of Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī”. Among his teachers was Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Zāhira. Al-Sakhāwī also says (4: 333): “his father was a Mālikī but he changed to the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* and he was appointed imam of the Ḥanbalīs in Mecca after the death of the son of his paternal uncle al-Nūr ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Aḥmad, then to the judgeship in 809 and he was the first Ḥanbalī to be appointed to a judgeship of Mecca”.

876 AH/1471 (of course, comparison of the figures here is very difficult).⁴⁷ Muḥibb al-Dīn was replaced a year later, in 862 AH/1457–8, by his nephew, Burhān al-Dīn ibn Ḥahira; it's not stated if he paid for the office. However, it is reported that Burhān al-Dīn remained in office until his death, in 892 AH/1487, when his son Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Ḥahira, succeeded him. Jamāl al-Dīn paid Sultan al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy (r. 872–901 AH/1468–1496) 10,000 dinars, 3,000 of which were owed by his father and 7,000 for his own appointment.⁴⁸

We also start to see connections between sharifs and chief judges. Although the judges were interrelated through marriage, they seem not to have intermarried with the sharifs. I have found only one instance of this: Sharif Ḥasan ibn 'Ajlān was married to the half-sister of Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī. One way, however, that the sharifs and judges were tied together was through the distribution of alms. Although there were now four chief judges, the Shāfi'ī chief judge, as in Cairo, still held greater prestige and responsibility, which included responsibility for oversight of the public treasury, pious endowments, and orphanages.⁴⁹ One feature of this position in Mecca was in the distribution of alms (*ṣadaqa*) which arrived every year from rulers abroad, ranging from the Ottomans in Anatolia, to the Tahirids of Yemen, to the sultans of India.⁵⁰ The Shāfi'ī chief judge supervised the distribution of alms following a customary division which granted the ruling sharif of Mecca one third of the sum. One instance, dated 20 Shawwāl 888 AH/21 November 1483, is typical:

[On Shawwāl 20] the Shāfi'ī judge Burhān al-Dīn [ibn Ḥahira], may God bless him for it, distributed *ṣadaqa* for Ramaḍān from al-Khaljī [of Mālwa, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Shāh ibn Maḥmūd (r. 873–906 AH/1469–1501)], at the hand of his messenger Yaḥyā, amounting to four hundred *ashrafīs*. Sayyid Muḥammad ibn Barakāt took one third of it, as customary, according to what I heard, and [Burhān al-Dīn] bestowed on the judges five, and the preachers four, and the religious officials and the remaining [significant] people (*al-nās*) two, one, two-thirds, one-half and one-third, extending [even] to many of the foreigners, which was not customary, but it appeared that he had a reason for that, but God alone knows.⁵¹

47 Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-Warā* 4:370–372; for the comparison, see Martel-Thoumian, "The Sale of Office", 75, whose study deals with a later period.

48 Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-Warā* 4: 381; 'Izz al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh al-Qirā* 1: 479–480.

49 Jackson, "Primacy of Domestic Politics", 53.

50 In fact, this practice may have occurred even earlier; however, we only have evidence for the second half of the fifteenth century.

51 'Izz al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh al-Qirā*, 1: 313.

More often, the author, Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd, would indicate where he stood in this hierarchy of largesse. A number of the gifts were more substantial, amounting to thousands or even tens of thousands of dinars which placed the Shāfiʿī judge in a key position, in terms of his relationship to the sharif and as patron to the religious elite in Mecca.⁵²

Yet one should be cautious in assuming that the relationship between the sharif and the Shāfiʿī judge was purely pecuniary and instrumental in nature. These men, the judges and the sharifs going back to the time of Ḥasan ibn ʿAjlān, were tied together by similar educational backgrounds. Sharif Muḥammad ibn Barakāt, like his father and grandfather, Ḥasan, had studied Shāfiʿī fiqh not only in Mecca, but also in Cairo and Damascus.⁵³ From 862 AH/1458 until the death of Sharif Muḥammad in 903 AH/1497, the Shāfiʿī chief judgeship was held by the aforementioned Burhan al-Dīn ibn Ḥahira and his son Jamāl al-Dīn. Both judges enjoyed close friendship with Sharif Muḥammad. Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd observed that the sharif and Burhan al-Dīn had a “firm friendship” and that “with his friendship [with Burhan al-Dīn,] the Sayyid obtained abundant blessings”.⁵⁴ ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn Fahd’s narrative noted frequently that the Sharif participated in Ibn Ḥahira family celebrations for marriages and circumcisions, and when Sharif Muḥammad was dying, Jamāl al-Dīn visited his older friend to offer his support.⁵⁵ So these men were tied together through common background as members of the class of notables with shared interests.

Nevertheless, such a bond between sharif and judge could also work to their detriment. About ten years after the death of Sharif Muḥammad and about five years after the occurrence of the anecdote I mentioned concerning the amir Azbak, shared interests brought together Sharif Aḥmad al-Jāzānī, one of the warring sons (yet again) of Sharif Muḥammad and the judge Abū al-Suʿūd ibn Ḥahira. At this time, Barakāt ibn Muḥammad had been waging a vicious war against his brother Aḥmad al-Jāzānī for control of Mecca as ruling sharif. Barakāt found letters from the judge Ibn Ḥahira revealing his support for the cause of Aḥmad. The messages from the judge urged the latter to take over Mecca and drive out Barakāt. Barakāt’s men captured the judge, stripped him of his possessions, and took him to the island of Qunfidha off the Hijazi coast where he was drowned.⁵⁶ Clearly, a judicial appointment counted for little in the context of Meccan politics.

52 For a discussion of these instances, with citations, see Meloy, *Imperial Power*, 191–197.

53 Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *al-Durr al-Kamīn*, 1:103–121, no. 70.

54 Najm al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *al-Durr al-Kamīn*, 1:612, no. 524.

55 ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh al-Qirā* 2:1019; for a brief discussion of the context, see Meloy, *Imperial Power*, 196.

56 ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh al-Qirā*, 2:1210; al-Sinjārī, *Manāʾih al-Karam*, 3:114–127.

6 Concluding Remarks

Noteworthy is that these families of judges, along with the Banū Ḥasan themselves, were coopted by Cairo just as Cairo coopted the power of the pilgrimage, the wealth of the trade routes, and the authority of the sharifs. In this regard, the Sultanate's state possessed a kind of "legibility", that is, an ability "to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion", to quote James Scott, in an effort "to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation".⁵⁷ The legibility of the pre-modern state is, I would argue, short-changed by Scott, who claims that it "knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their very identity".⁵⁸ In response, one might at first think of the Cairo Sultanate's encyclopedic chancery manuals or the detailed compilations of cadastral data produced by Ibn Duqmāq (ca. 797 AH/1395) and Ibn al-Jī'ān (d. 885 AH/1480). The difference, it would appear to me, at least with regard to the Cairo Sultanate is that the modes of control were not even relatively simpler, but just simply different. In the context of the Hijaz, Cairo read the social landscape with reasonable accuracy and used a variety of means to integrate the local Sunni judicial elite into the Sultanate's legal apparatus, which served to overcome, if only partially, the distance between Cairo and Mecca.

The Sunni judges of Mecca (and presumably also those who worked in the other cities of the Hijaz) seem to have been willing to be incorporated into the Sultanate's political structure. At the administrative level, the sharifs of Mecca were also willing to be incorporated into the state hierarchy, at least superficially, using their association with Cairo to their own local political advantage. This bureaucratic stratagem, evincing a form of legibility, was both expedient and effective as a means of control within the interplay between Cairo and Mecca. However, there was quite a different situation at the ideological level because the sharifs—as Zaydis—posed a serious threat to Cairo. The sharifs threatened, first, the security of the state as potential allies to the Ilkhans and,

57 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 2–3 and 82.

58 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 2. One problem is that his concept of legibility is based on the historical category of "high modernism"; in this respect, the concept doesn't work in other eras. Another issue is that his definition relies on Foucault's "governmentality" which assumes the state's interest in improving members of society (p. 91) or simply the notion that states are supposed to serve their citizens. Nevertheless, I think Scott's notion of how states "see" is useful; in the context of the fifteenth century, how and what states "saw" was different.

second, the credibility of the Cairo Sultanate as ideological adversaries to a Sunni regime. Here, to achieve hegemony, the Cairo Sultanate used selective violence against Zaydī officials and simultaneously exploited sharifian rivalries to achieve their political objectives in the Hijaz.

Was Cairo's control over the Hijaz in the fifteenth century reliant on the extension of hegemony in the preceding century? It is clear that the Cairo Sultanate's hegemony over Mecca preceded its political control and may well have facilitated it, just as Egypt's economic hegemony over the Hijaz must have restricted the autonomy of local elites. Egypt's cultural and social hegemony allowed political domination of the Hijazi elite to function more effectively and, one can surmise, at less cost to Cairo. In spite of the ability of the Cairo Sultanate to read the social and political landscape of the Hijaz, the sultans could not achieve either direct control or hegemony over the tribal groups that lived there, thus they relied on the local political order of the sharifs.

Finally, to return to legibility, when the judges rebuked Azbak—"you've ruined Egypt, you want to ruin Mecca too?"—they were evidently blind to the fact that Mecca had been Mamlukized long before amir Azbak's arrival, and that they, as part of the local elite, were part and parcel of that process.

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The Syrian Commercial Elite and Mamluk State-Building in the Fifteenth Century

Patrick Wing

In Rajab 889/July-August 1484, the Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf Qāyrbāy appointed Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Muzalliq chief Shāfiʿī *qāḍī* in Damascus.¹ This office was the most distinguished and lucrative post for members of the religious elite in late medieval Syria, and the holder of this position enjoyed a status as a high-ranking member of the *ʿulamāʾ*, as well as substantial material compensation and power within the ruling hierarchy of the state. Shams al-Dīn's family had been a cornerstone of the economy and social fabric of Damascus for most of the 15th century, and provides an illustration of the historical changes that affected the development of the Sultanate more broadly in this period. The *qāḍī*'s grandfather, also known as Shams al-Dīn, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Muzalliq, was not a judge, but made the family's fortune in trade with India in the late 8th/14th and early 9th/15th centuries. His commercial contacts, in combination with the political alliances he forged during the period of civil war in Syria in the first decade of the 9th/15th century, assured his family's position of wealth and influence for generations to come. In this chapter we consider what the history of the Banū Muzalliq at Damascus suggests about the historical development of the Mamluk Sultanate's state. Members of the family were merchants involved in Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade in the Hijaz, as well as Syria, filled positions in the military and financial administration of the Sultanate by the second generation, and occupied roles in the religious judiciary by the third. The Muzalliq family aligned their interests locally in Damascus, as well as transregionally, with those of the sultans, beginning in a period at the start of the 9th/15th century when Syria had fallen outside of the direct control of Cairo, and gradually integrated with the Sultanate's political elite as Syria itself was more firmly re-integrated into the realm. An examination of the commercial elite of Syria suggests parallels to the broadening of the Sultanate's religious and intellectual elite of the same period, as individuals with ties outside the Cairo citadel, and across political boundaries, became servants of the state.

¹ Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr*, 3: 203.

The rise of the Banū Muzalliq was closely connected to the political and economic challenges facing the Sultanate of Cairo in the early fifteenth century. The accession of al-Zāhir Barqūq in 784/1382 has traditionally been understood as an important turning point in the history of the 'Mamluk' Sultanate. Barqūq's Circassian origins, his reliance on a well-cultivated circle of dependents and supporters, and his dispensing with the acknowledgement of a descendant of Qalāwūn as sultan have all been identified as important features of Barqūq's reign, marking a shift in the political culture of the Sultanate.² The reign of his son and successor, al-Nāṣir Faraj, has typically been viewed as a continuation of the Circassian revolution that Barqūq began, and evidence that Barqūq sought to establish a new dynastic tradition, based on his own lineage. At the same time, however, there are some good reasons for viewing Faraj's reign (801–815/1399–1412) as an important turning point in its own right, particularly when considering the place that Syria held in the Sultanate. Syria suffered traumatic economic and military setbacks in the first decade of the fifteenth century, brought on by a combination of crop failure, inflation, the invasion of Tīmūr in 803/1400–1401, and the subsequent civil war among military factions. In fact, there is good reason to think of Syria as basically falling out of the orbit of the Sultanate in Cairo, if not in the imagination of the political elite, then in practical terms. In general, the violent arrival of representatives of Chaghatayid Central Asia in the Nile-to-Oxus region in the late-fourteenth and early fifteenth-centuries created great upheaval among the representatives of the post-Ilkhanid political order, and to the extent that Syria was connected economically and socially to Anatolia, Iraq and northwestern Iran, it too felt the impact of these disturbances. Although the Euphrates is often considered a significant political boundary, the fact was that for merchants, scholars, and even members of the military elite, Syria and the Ilkhanid realm were part of a continuum. Sultan Barqūq was able to maintain control of his realm to a reasonable degree during most of Tīmūr's early campaigns in Iran. However, after Faraj took the throne, military factions competing for influence over the young sultan became more and more powerful.³ Tīmūr's

2 The notion that Barqūq's reign represented a significant change in the history of the Sultanate is evident in the most common scheme of periodization in the field of Mamluk history, which has traditionally identified a "Turkish" or "Baḥrī" period from 1250–1382, and a "Circassian" or "Burjī" period from 1382–1517. However, recent scholarship has begun to challenge the idea of an abrupt break with the past with Barqūq's accession, and emphasizes the ways in which Barqūq sought to merge his own dynastic ambitions with long-standing institutions and rituals. See Van Steenberghe, "Ritual, Politics, and the City in Mamluk Cairo", p. 265.

3 For a masterful study of the political conflicts among the Mamluk elite in the early 15th century, see Onimus, *Les Maîtres du Jeu*, pp. 223–270.

invasion of Syria and occupation of Damascus contributed to an already difficult economic situation, and left Syria open to political fragmentation once Timūr withdrew.

Accompanying these political challenges facing the Sultanate were two significant economic developments. One was the expansion of Venetian commercial influence in Syria in the early fifteenth century.⁴ A combination of factors in the last quarter of the fourteenth century had driven Venice out of Famagusta on Cyprus by the Genoese in 1373, Cilicia by the Sultanate's armies in 1375, and the northern Black Sea by Timūr in the 1390s, thus making the Mediterranean ports,⁵ as well as Damascus and Aleppo, significant points of contact between Europe and the eastern silk and spice trade, via Venetian merchants. At the same time, Syro-Egyptian elites turned their attention to taxation of the transit trade, especially in spices, between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean in order to increase revenues that had declined from agrarian *iqṭā's*.⁶ Access to the spice trade required cooperation with other polities and merchant networks, including Venice.⁷ The Venetians thus became the main middlemen between the Cairo Sultanate and European markets in the fifteenth century.⁸

The other significant economic development in the early fifteenth century was the rise of a new commercial elite operating within the Syro-Egyptian realm, seemingly replacing the so-called Kārimī merchants, who had dominated the eastern spice trade in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea from at least the Ayyubid period.⁹ The height of the Kārimīs' power and influence coincided with the reign of Barqūq at the end of the fourteenth century.¹⁰ Yet, their wealth seems to have vanished along with the general collapse of the Egyptian economy at the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹¹ As the influence of the Kārimīs declined, the activity of merchants in Syria seems to have increased. Trade expanded among both foreigners, mainly Venetians, as well as local merchant notables, often referred to collectively as *khawājas*, or *khawājakiyya*, as

4 Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p. 324. Ashtor points out that the Venetians were especially active at Hama, Latakia, Tripoli, and Sarmin.

5 Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East*, pp. 325–326.

6 Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, p. 33.

7 Christ, "Beyond the Network—Connectors of Networks", p. 28.

8 Arbel, "The Last Decades of Venice's Trade with the Mamluks", p. 37.

9 Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*, p. 268; Mortel, "The Mercantile Community of Mecca", p. 20.

10 Ashtor, "The Kārimī Merchants", p. 53.

11 Ashtor, "The Kārimī Merchants", p. 54.

many of them were identified by this *laqab*.¹² However, there is some ambiguity about what this title actually meant in the context of the commercial economy. The title “*khawāja*” is of Persian origin, and has been used with a variety of meanings, depending on the period and place. In the case of Egypt and Syria, it came to be applied mainly to wealthy merchants working in official service to the sultan, who had come from outside his domains.¹³ It may also be a mistake to consider the *khawājakiyya* as a distinct group operating only after about 1400. Sato Tsugitaka has identified the great slave trader Majd al-Dīn al-Sallāmī (d. 743/1342) who operated between Cairo and Tabriz as a *khawāja* merchant,¹⁴ and in fact has emphasized his business in slaves as setting him and his like apart from the Kārimīs, who dealt in the spice trade.¹⁵ Sato has also highlighted the career of the great *khawāja* slave merchant Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Uthmān al-As‘ardī (d. 783/1381), renowned for having imported Barqūq to Egypt from Circassia. As‘ardī’s *qaysariyya*, or market complex in Damascus, anchored his business in Syria as much as in Egypt.¹⁶

Richard Mortel has written on the large percentage of fifteenth century *khawāja* merchants in Mecca whose families hailed from other places.¹⁷ As Mortel has pointed out, many merchants with the title “*khawāja*” were born in Mecca, but had fathers with *nisbas* indicating they hailed from other places.¹⁸ During Barsbāy’s reign, these merchants were recruited more directly into the service of the Sultanate as Barsbāy attempted to extend his personal control more fully over trade at Jedda and Mecca. One of the merchants who received the title *murshidd* of Jedda, an office that served as liaison between the sultan’s officials and the merchant community in Jedda, was Shams al-Dīn Dā‘ūd b ‘Alī al-Kaylānī,¹⁹ whose *nisba* indicated his family’s origins in Gilan in northern

12 Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East*, p. 321.

13 Sato, “Slave Traders and Kārimī Merchants during the Mamluk Period”, p. 143. The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* points out the variety of meanings that the title “*khawāja*”, which is Persian in origin, has held throughout Islamic history, depending on the period and the place. In the Syro-Egyptian case, Qalqashandī’s description of a “*khawāja*” as an important Persian or other foreign merchant was the primary way the title was applied, in contrast to the Ottoman case, where it became a designation of members of the *‘ulamā’*. See “*Khawādja*”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Volume 2 (Leiden: Brill), 4: 907.

14 Sato, “Slave Traders and Kārimī Merchants during the Mamluk Period”, p. 144.

15 Sato, “Slave Traders and Kārimī Merchants during the Mamluk Period”, pp. 152–154. Sato contrasts the slave traders with the Kārimīs by pointing out that the Kārimīs were engaged in more religious and cultural activities, while the slave traders came to be regarded as state officials, which the Kārimīs never were.

16 Sato, “Slave Traders and Kārimī Merchants during the Mamluk Period”, p. 144.

17 Mortel, “The Mercantile Community of Mecca”, p. 19.

18 Mortel, “The Mercantile Community of Mecca”, p. 24.

19 Mortel, “The Mercantile Community of Mecca”, p. 22.

Iran. Mortel calculates that significant percentages of the great many merchants in Mecca who were immigrants were from Iran, Syria, and Egypt (with smaller numbers from Yemen, Iraq, and Anatolia).²⁰

With the exception of Yemen, all of these places had been shaken by upheavals by the Timurids. The turmoil among Timur's descendants following his death in 1405 led to political fragmentation across Iran and Anatolia, as well as in Syria, where amirs took advantage of the chaos to compete for control of the Sultanate. The fact that the agricultural economy of Egypt was in decline, and was leading to the failure of the traditional system of revenue disbursement (*iqṭā'*) at the same time that these upheavals in the Timurid realm were taking place, meant that merchants with ties to far-flung markets would be valuable to the fiscal welfare of the Sultanate. Syria was brought back into the sultan's realm, beginning during al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh's reign (815/1412–824/1421), but the Syrian provinces were integrated with Egypt in a new way—the merchant elites operating in Syria, with connections to the Timurid realm and the Hijaz, became an important point of contact between the Sultanate in Cairo and the Levantine cities. This fact not only meant that the Syrian commercial elite would play a greater role in the projection of the sultan's authority, but also that its personnel would be shaped by a cosmopolitanism informed by social and cultural ties across a wide geographic area, from Cairo to Tabriz, and Aleppo to Mecca.

Francisco Javier Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta has illustrated the ways that the *khawājakiyya* were incorporated into the administrative structures of the Sultanate.²¹ Although they remained private merchants, they acted in concert with the interests of the sultan, and received formal recognition for their services from Cairo.²² Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta has argued that the *khawāja* merchants can be considered a privileged merchant guild under the protection of the Sultanate, comparable to the chartered trade companies of Spain and Portugal.²³

An example of the wealth and prestige enjoyed by these new commercial elites can be found in the case of perhaps the greatest Syrian merchant family of the fifteenth century, the afore-mentioned Banū Muzalliq. The Muzalliq family had ties to the Hijaz, as well as with Syria, and this made them important in the economic and social integration of these regions by the Sultanate. The foundations of the family's wealth, and thus of their entrée into the Sultanate's

20 Mortel, "The Mercantile Community of Mecca", pp. 25, 35.

21 Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*, p. 103.

22 Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*, pp. 104–108.

23 Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*, p. 104.

elite, was trade in the Indian Ocean. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 848/1444) made his fortune sailing to India, and was involved in commercial life in the Hijaz as well as in Syria.²⁴ His relationship with the amir Shaykh al-Maḥmūdī, the future Sultan al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, enabled him to leverage his commercial success in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade into a role valuable to the economy of the future sultan's household, and thence into the political hierarchy of the Sultanate. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Muzalliq's family was one of several prominent Syrian merchant families who are designated as "*khawājas*" in the sources, all of which traveled in common social circles in Damascus.²⁵ The *khawāja* merchants were in a position to facilitate the transfer of wealth from trade to amirs competing for supremacy in Syria in the first decade of the 9th/15th century. Damascus in particular was a city where conflict among amirs played out, largely due to the abundance of pious foundations (*waqf*) which could be seized to fund military operations.²⁶ The two main factions in the civil war during the second reign of al-Nāṣir Faraj (808/1405–815/1412) were those of the amirs Shaykh al-Maḥmūdī and Nawrūz al-Ḥāfiẓī.²⁷ In 811/1408, following his defeat of Nawrūz al-Ḥāfiẓī and capture of Damascus, Shaykh al-Maḥmūdī relied on Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad to deliver 5,000 dinars from the merchant community there.²⁸ Shams al-Dīn's services paid off, as the Banū Muzalliq's relationship to the most successful amir in the conflict in Syria ensured their commercial privileges in Syria, and in the Sultanate writ large once Shaykh became sultan. Ibn al-Muzalliq's privileged status is confirmed in a document preserved by Qalqashandī, confirming his exemption from taxation in Egypt and Syria.²⁹

For the next three decades, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Muzalliq was known as *kabīr al-tujjār*, head merchant at Damascus. His wealth not only allowed him to lay a foundation for his family's influence locally and throughout the Sultanate (more on this point below), but it also allowed him to reinvest in the commercial infrastructure of Syria. He paid for the improvement of roads, and built khans, or caravanserais, throughout Syria. According to the fifteenth century historian and biographer al-Sakhāwī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad bequeathed a third of his wealth upon his death for the completion of a khan complex, while dividing the rest among the poor (*fuqarā'*) of Mecca and Medina, Jerusalem, and Damascus. His influence extended well beyond his home

24 Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*, pp. 79–80.

25 Vallet, *L'Arabie Marchande*, p. 646.

26 Onimus, *Les Maîtres du Jeu*, p. 261.

27 Onimus, *Les Maîtres du Jeu*, p. 250.

28 Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 72.

29 Labib, "Egyptian Commercial Policy in the Middle Ages", p. 75.

city, and aligned well with the sultans' interest in maintaining control over Syria as well as its trade.³⁰

Despite his wealth and status, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad was still vulnerable to changing political circumstances, illustrated by his imprisonment in 843/1439 following the accession of Sultan al-Zāhir Jaqmaq. Held in confinement in the Damascus citadel, Shams al-Dīn was only released after his son paid 5,000 dinars to the treasury, and 10,000 dinars to the *dīwān al-khāṣṣ*.³¹ In addition to providing a window into the extortionist practices of the central government, this incident also sheds light on the extent to which the new sultan looked to the Syrian merchant elite to fund his campaign to take the throne. The fact that the Muzalliq family delivered less than Jaqmaq demanded³² also suggests that they had some leverage for negotiation with the Sultanate. In any case, by the time of his death five years later at the age of more than eighty years, Ibn al-Muzalliq had become an essential part of the Sultanate's state in Syria. His importance to the ruling elite is exemplified by reports of the huge turnout at his funeral, attended by local elite (*a'yān*), including the governor of Damascus, the highest ranking official in Syria.³³

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad's progeny benefited from their father's prominent position in the Sultanate. While one son, 'Umar, died before his father from the plague in 841/1437–1438,³⁴ another son, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad (d. 873/1468) became known as a successful merchant in his own right. Although he did not hold any government offices,³⁵ Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad did invest in the pious institutions of his city, establishing a kitchen (*maṭbakh*) near the Bāb al-Barīd, on the western side of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. However, the most significant member of the Muzalliq family in the generation after Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad was his son Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan. He played a significant role in the extension of sultanic authority over trade at Jedda and Mecca during the reign of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbāy (r. 825/1422–841/1438). In 841/1438, Barsbāy appointed Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan to the position of amir of Jedda, and dispatched him to that city along with the *nāẓir* of Jedda, Sa'd al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. al-Marra.³⁶ The

30 Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'*, 8: 174; Sakhāwī, *al-Tibr*, 243.

31 Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 1157.

32 Maqrīzī writes that the sultan had demanded 30,000 dinars for the treasury. See Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 1157.

33 Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'*, 8: 174; Sakhāwī, *al-Tibr*, 243.

34 Sakhāwī, *al-Tibr*, 243.

35 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī' al-Zuhūr*, 3: 17.

36 Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4: 1028, 1030; Ibn Fahd, *Ithāf al-Warā'*, 4: 115–116. On the career of Ibn al-Marra and his role in the extension of Mamluk authority to the Hijaz, see Wing, "Indian Ocean Trade and Sultanic Authority".

Muzalliq family had thus by this time converted their prominence in Indian Ocean-Red Sea trade, as well as their alliance with the Sultanate, into a government position at the port of Mecca. This appointment was part of a larger process by which the Sultanate was attempting to bring the Hijaz more closely under the control of the sultan's own agents, appointed from Cairo, replacing the local dynasty of *sharīfs* who had served as intermediaries between the Sultanate and the merchants there.³⁷

Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan's other major appointment was from Sultan al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy to the position of *nāzīr al-jaysh* (army comptroller) of Damascus, in Dhū al-Qa'da 872/May-June 1468.³⁸ This position signals the arrival of the Banū Muzalliq in the ranks of the Sultanate's political elite in an official capacity. Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan had begun his career at the side of his father as a merchant, was brought into the government hierarchy in Jedda by Barsbāy, and raised to a high office in the military administration under Qāyṭbāy.

Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan's son, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, represented the third generation of the Banū Muzalliq, and a final phase of their incorporation into the Sultanate's ruling elite by the late 15th century. We began this chapter by mentioning this Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, the namesake of his grandfather, and his appointment in 889/1484 to the office of Shāfi'ī *qāḍī* of Damascus. Like his father, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad acquired a position in the Sultanate's government apparatus. However, unlike his father, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad entered the ranks of the *'ulamā'*, the religious scholars, who ostensibly served to ensure Islamic justice in the Sultanate. He continued in this role until he was murdered in his home in 902/1497.³⁹

In the second chapter of this volume, Jan Dumolyn and Jo Van Steenberg highlight Michael Chamberlain's contribution to our understanding of Marshall Hodgson's "military patronage state", particularly Chamberlain's emphasis on social relationships, rather than on legalistic bureaucratic offices, as a way to best understand the dynamics of politics within the military patronage state. In a description of the Seljuk Sultanate that might also be applied to the Sultanate of Cairo, Chamberlain described the state as "a collection of powerful households kept in check by the head of the most powerful among them".⁴⁰ We might usefully ask where the Banū Muzalliq fit in to such a conception of the state? It may be useful to consider this elite merchant family as operating in two spheres: on one hand, as representatives of the sultan's own household,

37 See Meloy, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade*, particularly chapter 4.

38 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī' al-Zuhūr*, 3: 14.

39 Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī' al-Zuhūr*, 3: 350.

40 Chamberlain, "Military Patronage States", p. 142.

and agents of the extension of royal authority over other elite households and factions. On the other hand, the Banū Muzalliq, through their service to the sultan, also managed to establish an elite household of their own, that survived the fall of the Sultanate itself, and continued into the Ottoman period.

The Banū Muzalliq thus illustrate significant features of Syro-Egyptian state building in the 9th/15th century. They represent a merging of the political interests of the Sultanate with the commercial networks and wealth that the Syrian merchants could offer. They also represent the ways the family could leverage its relationship with the Sultanate to procure offices, property, and power within the political elite. Members of the family not only enjoyed privileged status as traders, but also acquired access to additional levers of power, all the while acting in roles of local patronage and investment in institutions of Islamic learning and devotion, in Damascus as well as in the Hijaz. The Banū Muzalliq were a cosmopolitan elite, whose rise within the Sultanate was not confined to a barracks or city quarter, but which put them in contact with a wider world of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean economic and political patterns.

Such a cosmopolitanism among the merchant elite should not surprise us, given what scholarship has shown us about networks of intellectuals and men of religion in the same period. Already by the middle of the fourteenth century there is evidence that the Sultanate was encouraging Ḥanafī legal scholars from outside Egypt and Syria, primarily from Anatolia and Iran, to train in the madrasas of Cairo. Leonor Fernandes has shown that the endowment documents (*waqfiyya*) from madrasas founded by prominent amirs in the second half of the fourteenth century stipulate “foreign” Ḥanafī students be appointed to positions in the madrasas.⁴¹ The purpose seems to have been to train a cadre of religious scholars that would serve as a counterweight to the influence of the local Shāfi‘ī *‘ulamā’*, who had traditionally enjoyed a privileged status and a good deal of power in the ongoing negotiation of moral authority between the military elite and the local population.⁴² As a result, the madrasas and *khānqāhs* of Syria and Egypt, and particularly Cairo, came to be filled by Turkish- and Persian-speaking individuals who forged ties with others

41 Fernandes, “Mamluk Politics and Education”, pp. 91–93. Jo Van Steenberghe has shown how patronage of Ḥanafī jurists by the amir Yalbughā, who emerged as the main power behind the throne in the 1360s, fit into a larger pattern of continuity in the cultural preferences and roles played by the Qalāwūnid sultans in the fourteenth century. See Van Steenberghe, “The Amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī, the Qalāwūnid Sultanate, and the Cultural Matrix of Mamlūk Society”, pp. 439–441.

42 Fernandes, “Mamluk Politics and Education”, p. 98; Levanoni, “Who were the ‘Salt of the Earth’”, pp. 80–82.

like them, as well as with the ruling elite who underwrote their education through the institutions they founded and endowed. The benefits did not flow one direction however. While the sultan and amirs provided the economic foundation for the *'ulamā'*, the *'ulamā'* in turn lent spiritual legitimacy to the sultan's regime.⁴³

The scholars who came to Cairo from Anatolia, Iran, and elsewhere formed their own informal networks. In addition to facilitating the exchange of scholarship, such networks could also facilitate contact with the sultan and other powerful individuals. An example can be seen in the life of Shaykh Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Simavī, best known for leading a rebellion against the Ottomans in 819/1416. Born and raised in Ottoman Thrace, Shaykh Badr al-Dīn, like so many scholars of his age, eventually made his way to Cairo to study logic and philosophy. Here he came into the circle of the well-known physician and master of occult sciences Shaykh Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī (d. 799/1397). As İlker Evrim Binbaş has shown, Akhlāṭī had a profound influence on Shaykh Badr al-Dīn and helped to shape his ideas about mysticism and the occult, which informed his rebellion years later in the Ottoman lands.⁴⁴ Sultan Barqūq himself had an interest in Sufism and the occult,⁴⁵ and members of Akhlāṭī's circle, many of whom hailed from Iran or Anatolia,⁴⁶ enjoyed the favor of the court. Akhlāṭī himself was a close companion of Barqūq, while Shaykh Badr al-Dīn became tutor to Barqūq's son, the future Sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj.⁴⁷

Thus, by the turn of the fifteenth century, the sultans in Cairo had begun to establish a pattern of ties and patronage among intellectuals who would challenge the orthodoxy of the traditional Egyptian *'ulamā'*, and would both serve and benefit from their relationship with the ruling military elite. It seems that a similar development may have been underway with respect to integration of merchant networks, which crossed political boundaries in the same way the intellectual networks did, at a moment when the sultan and the political elite saw their fortunes tied increasingly to the commercial economy and when merchants operating across political boundaries and outside the control of the sultan's administrative apparatus, recognized the advantages of working for and under the protection of the sultan.

43 Lev, "Symbiotic Relations: Ulama and the Mamluk Sultans".

44 Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, pp. 122–140.

45 Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, p. 117.

46 Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, pp. 132–135, idem, "The Anatomy of a Regicide Attempt", pp. 411–412.

47 Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, p. 126; Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, p. 74.

Conclusion

The Banū Muzalliq were products of the political and economic circumstances of the 9th/15th century, and their rise and integration into the Syro-Egyptian political elite suggest some realities of state formation in the Sultanate. First, the conflicts among amirs in the first decade of the 9th/15th century meant that Syria would play a role apart from Egypt, but also central to the factional struggles of the period. In these struggles, and particularly during the last phase of civil war between the factions of Shaykh al-Maḥmūdī and Nawrūz al-Ḥāfīzī, wealth from Syria, taken in the form of taxes from local populations, played an important role. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Muzalliq was able to serve the immediate local political interests of the amirs (Shaykh in particular), through his success in the transregional commercial ventures that connected the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Mediterranean in this period. Ibn al-Muzalliq thus offered a valuable service to the amir, and later Sultan al-Muʿayyad Shaykh, as well as his successor, al-Ashraf Barsbāy. Taking over from his father, the *kabīr al-tujjār* of Damascus, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad's son, Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan, moved into administrative roles that signaled both his family's rise to prominence, as well as the Sultanate's dependence on trade in the Hijaz and Levant for its economic prosperity. By the third generation, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan had solidified the family's influence over both trade and the levers of legal authority, including over *awqāf*, as chief *qāḍī* of Damascus. The Banū Muzalliq thus illustrate a path to the political elite that did not begin in the citadel or a madrasa. That is, this family of merchants were outsiders, whose connections and influence at the peripheries of the Cairo Sultanate made them valuable partners in the state's extension of its authority via loyal agents of the sultan.

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Settling Accounts with the Sultan: *Cortesia*, *Zemechia* and Venetian Fiscality in Fifteenth-Century Alexandria

Georg Christ

On the morning of the tenth of January 1420, four high-ranking Venetian merchants made their way towards the office of the Venetian consul, Biagio Dolfin, in the *fondaco* in Alexandria, Egypt.¹ The four, Carlo Contarini, Lorenzo Bembo, Angelo Michiel, and Polo Michiel then proceeded to copy pages 45, 95 and 111 of the consul's ledger ('libro'). Each of them produced their own copy of these pages and each of them added a note specifying that they had done this on the behest of the consul.² Such procedure seems unusual. Who were these merchants and what had happened? What was contained in the consul's ledger to motivate such solemn proceedings?

1 Introduction

Unlike the consular ledgers, which seem to be lost, these four copies survive. They contain excerpts from two accounts settling claims between the sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (r. 1412–1421) and the Venetian consul Biagio Dolfin (consul from 1418–1420) as well as between the sultan's customs inspector (Fakhr al-Dīn ibn Sufeir, in office 1415–25) and the Venetian community in Alexandria of the years 1418 and 1419.³ These accounts document transactions at the very

1 Many thanks to Jo Van Steenberghe, Malika Dekkiche and Kristof D'hulster for inviting me to the most inspiring international conference "Whither the Early Modern State? Fifteenth-Century State Formations across Eurasia. Connections, Divergences, and Comparisons" in Ghent, 10–12 September 2014, where a first draft of this contribution was presented. Thanks also to Natalie Sharpin for thoughtful comments and Angela Marisol Roberts for elegant copy-editing.

2 "In Alexandria + MCCCCXVIII a dì X zener e fo di maitina. Ad istanzia de miser Blaxio Dolfin consollo nostro, io Anzollo Michiel assieme con ser Lorenzo Bembo, ser Polo Michiel et ser Carlo Contarini fo de miser Iacomo, in la decima, in casa soa, al suo scriver", account copy A. Michiel, see for another version Appendix 1 of this chapter (end).

3 Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, on Biagio Dolfin pp. 97–110; on Fakhr al-Dīn p. 91 *seq.*, on Venetians in Alexandria p. 95 *seq.* and *passim*.

pulse of Veneto-Mamluk relations: the transit trade in spices. What do they tell us about Veneto-Mamluk relations and thus about the status of Venetians and Venice within the Cairo Sultanate or Mamluk Empire? Jo Van Steenberghe has recently discussed the problematic implications of the Mamlukization of late medieval Syro-Egyptian history, i.e. the tendency to interpret the multiple forms of statehood and power projection but also cultural expression, social life etc. of the Cairo Sultanate as 'Mamluk'.⁴

Another facet of the 'Mamlukization' phenomenon is a tendency to reduce the range of the Sultanate's imperial policies to the centers of Egypt and Syria, Cairo and Damascus. While it is acknowledged that the Cairo Sultanate played a minor role in the Hijaz and in Nubia, the wider rim of the sultan's realm, also including Latin European powers, is often ignored.⁵ Veneto-Mamluk relations have been studied as bilateral relations between two a priori distinct and equal entities. Writing in a time of nation states, great scholars from Wilhelm Heyd to Eliyahu Ashtor thus tended to see these relations in a somewhat anachronistic way as bilateral agreements or treaties between independent states.⁶ The more recent study of Francisco Apellániz foregrounded fiscal elements and rightly interpreted these relations as a symbiosis or even Venetian exploitation rather than Mamluk oppression.⁷ Yet the impression thus remains bilateral and actual modes of integration, the peculiar arrangement under which Venetians did business in Alexandria not so much as members of a foreign nation state but as an integrated and integral part of the sultan's realm, remains underexplored.⁸

4 Van Steenberghe, "Mamlukisation". I will use the terms Sultanate or Cairo Sultanate (cf. the term *Soldan del Chairo* used in the Venetian accounts transcribed in the appendix) rather than 'Mamluk Empire' but retain the term 'Veneto-Mamluk' relations as a convenient shorthand and because of its widespread use in the literature. The term is, however, problematic as these relations connected the Doge (and to an extent his subjects, the Venetians, even somewhat including all Latin Christians) and the sultan rather than state-like entities as the term would imply.

5 Ibid., for an exception, see Dekkiche, "State Recognition in the Service of State Formation?" and also her thesis currently prepared for publication: *Le Caire. Carrefour des Ambassades*. She is currently in the process of extending her analysis to Mamluk policies with regard to European powers. On the Mamluk perception of other powers, see also Drory, "Maqrizi in Durar al-'Uqud with regard to Timur Leng"; Drory also gave a talk on the perception of European rulers in the same treatise at the 2013 CHESFAME in Ghent, which has not been published with the proceedings (cf. Vermeulen, D'hulster, and Van Steenberghe, eds., *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk eras VIII*).

6 Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant*, p. 49: "traités de commerce"; Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p. 27: "obtained an agreement", p. 68: "treaty".

7 Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*.

8 Cf. Christ, "The Venetian Consul".

Veneto-Mamluk relations were, to a great extent, brokered locally and they were not understood only as bilateral but also--and importantly--hierarchical relations. The day-to-day negotiating occurred in Alexandria as these accounts clearly illustrate. The sultanic privileges carefully respected the prerogatives of local legal custom. The local negotiations, however, did not unfold in some sort of game-theoretical void but within an hierarchical imperial taxonomy. This order, although perhaps weak in its enforcement, was still very real in its diplomatic and legal consequences. The sultan, at least formally, did not negotiate with either the Venetian doge or his ambassadors. The sultan was the patron, perhaps mediator and, most importantly, supreme judge. He granted the Venetian privileges and thus protection and status and he spoke out against novelties that would jeopardize the established status quo.⁹

The Venetians did not interact with the sultan *pari passu*. Venetian envoys instead negotiated with officials of more or less equal rank. The sultan thence magnanimously heard the resulting proposal as a supplication and generously granted privileges that were expressed in unilateral administrative decrees directed to his subordinates.¹⁰ The preserved Veneto-Mamluk instruments are thus no treaties but decrees issued by the sultan. There was nevertheless an underlying contractual relationship, which formally consisted in the sultan's offer (*ījāb*) of protection (*amān*) and the Venetian acceptance (*qabūl*) and submission to the sultan (*ṣulḥ*).¹¹ If the doge/the Venetians (in Alexandria) paid tribute to the sultan thus accepting the offer and submitting, Venice (concretely through the Venetians in Alexandria) came under his protection and thus became part of the Sultanate. Venice was thus removed from the *dār al-ḥarb* and became as *dār al-ṣulḥ* part of the Islamic empire and thus the Sultanate. The Venetian status was thereby in some respects akin to the status of the Levantine Christian or Jewish communities (*dhimma* i.e. protected communities of the so-called people of the books, who [contrary to pagan 'idolaters'] had a defined and relatively protected status within the Islamic Empire). The inclusion of the Venetians, ingenuously, was even drafted as the inclusion of the entire (Latin?) Christian world by addressing the doge as "*doxe glorioso, magnifico (...), lo honor de la generation de Yesu Christo, congregador de quelli che adora la croxe, Doxe de Venetiani* (the glorious, magnificent doge (...), the

9 Christ, "The Sultans and the Sea", p. 245.

10 Theunissen, "Ottoman Venetian Diplomats", pp. 39 seq., 43. For a full list of the privileges, *ibid.* p. 40 and Pedani, "Gli ultimi accordi", p. 54 seq.

11 *Ṣulḥ* (from *ṣalaha* to do the right thing) basically meaning peace and reconciliation (after a state of conflict), Khadduri, "Ṣulḥ", in *EI*², pp. 845a–846a (also online s.v.); Theunissen, "Ottoman Venetian Diplomats", p. 25 seq.

TABLE 9.1 The Cairo Sultanate's system of unitary government and inclusion of Venice

Empire (dār al-islām, mamlaka al-islamiyya)			
Kingdom, Nation, 'Country' (mamlaka)	Egypt		Realm of Latin Christians (Doge as primus inter pares of Christian world)
Province (a'mal)	Cairo	Alexandria	Venice as a tributary
Local government (safaka, barr)	Venetian community in Damascus		Venetian community in Alexandria

Blue denotes the sultanic, directly ruled realm, while light blue indicates fiscal prerogatives and delegation of power, e.g. over Alexandria. Orange indicates tributary relations such as those with the Venetian realm

honour of the generation of Jesus Christ, congregator of those who adore the cross, doge of the Venetians)".¹² This bolstered the doge's status and perhaps helped to justify far-reaching privileges. The Venetians (and consequently by extension and legal precedence all [Latin] Christian merchants), thus, were (or could be) exempted from discriminatory measures technically applying to the regular *dhimmī* communities such as the ban to ride horses, discriminatory clothing or the payment of the *jizya* tax. Instead, the Venetians paid a special tribute partially documented by the accounts under investigation.¹³

Yet trade with the Venetians was not handled in Cairo under the eyes of the sultan, who delegated dealings with the Venetians to his representatives in Alexandria. There, players of roughly the same level locally brokered the concrete rules of the game as evidenced by the accounts.

I suggest an explanatory framework of multi-tiered imperial rule (table 9.1). It comprehends the Cairo Sultanate as a hybrid political entity, which partially and somewhat akin to a modern unitary authority conflates different tiers of government (blue). In the case of the Cairo Sultanate, this means the convergence of municipal/district, provincial, royal/regional and imperial/international rule in

12 Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, p. 306.

13 See appendix.

the person and the institutions of the sultan. Yet, and this is very different from the modern unitary body, the geographical boundaries of the different tiers or levels of government were not identical.¹⁴ The sultan's direct authority over the local/household and provincial level in many ways did not exceed the citadel and parts of Cairo. Royal or regional rule was claimed over parts of Egypt (blue). Islamic imperial claims theoretically covered a much wider area: the Islamic world and to an extent, with the sultan as an "Alexander of the present times",¹⁵ even the entire *oikumene* (*oikomene*) or civilized world. What historical maps show as the Mamluk Sultanate, i.e. Egypt and Greater Syria, would be a de facto conglomerate (whereby rule over Syria was delegated) rather than a separate or 'official' tier.

I will thus consider the Cairo Sultanate as a conglomerate of large spaces around and relating to the imperial core of Cairo/Egypt.¹⁶ I take the sultan's rule to be construed as multi-tiered but with universal aspirations on the imperial level. The question is to which extent and how this rule materialized. What were the modes of imperial governance including the projection of power to places beyond the realm of the sultans' military control? I suggest that these spaces were hierarchically arranged and treated differently according to their function and their importance for the Sultanate. Rule over lower and middle Egypt as the core of the Sultanate had to be relatively direct (blue). Rule over areas in the wider realm of the Cairo sultanate including Upper Egypt and Syria was delegated (light blue), while rule over peripheral areas such as the desert borders, Red Sea, or the Mediterranean was left to tributary and more independent actors, such as Bedouin leaders, the sultans of Aden, Sharifs of Mecca or, last but not least, the Doges of Venice, who carried a whiff of royal rank (as some sort of *primus inter pares* of (Latin) Christians (orange)).

14 These boundaries are in any case blurred: see for the only partial/seasonal domination of the Hijaz, Meloy, *Imperial Power*, p. 234 and *passim*; for Anatolia: Wing, "Submission, Defiance, and the Rules of Politics"; Adriaenssens and Van Steenberghe, "Mamluk Authorities and Anatolian Realities".

15 *Alexandro de questo tempo* ("Alexander of this time"), one of the sultan's titles used in the privileges issued to the Venetians (Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, II, p. 306).

16 "Large space" might evoke Schmitt, *Völkerrechtliche Grossraumordnung*, which was written in support of German expansionism leading to World War II. Besides its problematic ideological penchant (re-emerging today in the context of the Ukraine conflict), this concept is of but limited use in the Mamluk context as empire and world order are programmatically congruent, while Schmitt seems to advocate a multilateral imperial order, i.e. a world structured around a few competing empires or *Grossräume*, cf. Voigt, *Grossraum-Denken*.

The graduations are, of course, somewhat arbitrary and the transitions are fluid: Ruling Cairo meant complex negotiations with many power brokers and delegation of much power. Indeed, delegation of power, at least formally, is the process of power devolvement that is tying together the various realms. For the sultan's power was fading not only in the imperial peripheries of the Red Sea area or the Mediterranean but also in some parts of Cairo. Thus power over a province or district near Cairo or over Syria was also delegated but more tightly controlled as (military) projection was regular and thus a plausible threat. The sultan's power, however, much less pervaded areas such as the Mediterranean, the Hijaz or the southern Red Sea area. He thus 'ruled' these areas via less controlled delegation characterized by a higher degree of negotiation. The delegation of power in the southern Red Sea to the Rasulid sultans, for instance, was largely a formal construction.¹⁷

The sultan, as it were, wore four hats: He was ruler of the faithful but also Alexander of his time and thus some sort of universal ruler (empire), ruler of (core-)Egypt (kingdom), mayor of Cairo (province) and, finally, head of his household and of his personal military units (local government).

Venice would thus be integrated into the sultans' realm in two ways. Indirectly and bottom-up Venetians were organized as autonomous, protected communities e.g. in Damascus and Alexandria. Directly and top-down were the tributary relations with the Doge as head of the Venetians.

Needless to say that this sketch (table 9.1) cannot capture accurately or holistically the complexities of the Sultanate's political structure. It is not a descriptive but an analytical model to analyse Mamluk-Venetian relations.¹⁸

After a few words on Venetian trade in Alexandria, I will briefly sketch the evolution of the institutional framework of Veneto-Mamluk relations with particular emphasis on two types of payments: the *cortesia* paid by Venetians to

17 Vallet, *L'Arabie marchande*, p. 516.

18 More layers would arguably have to be defined such as districts, the Sultanate's core lands vs. its Islamic tributaries etc. Also the distinction between *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* might have to be considered more thoroughly. Then, of course, one would have to pay attention to the peculiarity of many pre-modern states (including, to an extent, today's England) which are characterized by the coexistence of different types of state finances, only partially to be separated from the ruler's finances (cf. the Roman *fiscus* and *aerarium*), which can complicate things considerably. Alexandria's revenues went to the *dāwān al-khāṣṣ*, i.e. could be considered to be part of the sultan's demesne but it was not his private property (*mulk*), which typically would be protected against the grasp from future sultans/the state by being turned into religious foundations, cf. Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East*, p. 318; Daisuke, *Land Tenure*, pp. 177–204; Loiseau, *Reconstruire la Maison du sultan*, p. 188 seq.

local officials and the *zemechia* paid by the sultan to the Venetian consul. Against this backdrop I will analyze the evidence of the accounts under investigation and conclude by reviewing the hypotheses raised above.

2 Background: Venetians in Alexandria and Fiscal Inclusion

Alexandria had lost much of its ancient glory but was still the main port of Egypt in 1420. The global spice route had shifted south in the wake of the disintegrating Mongol Empire and a great deal of the trade with Indian spices, precious metal and cloth passed through Alexandria. For that reason, the town was teeming with diasporic trading communities of many nations and provenances. Prominent among them were the Venetians. The Venetian republic controlled a substantial part of the transcontinental spice trade in the Eastern Mediterranean and thus maintained a strong permanent presence with two *fondachi* (caravanserais) under the guidance of a consul assisted by a notary and a doctor.¹⁹

The Venetian nation in Alexandria had a great deal of discretion as to who would classify as Venetian for the purpose of belonging to their community or using its services including other Italians or colonial subjects, some of which were Jewish but also other Christian merchants. Some of these merchants visited Alexandria only very briefly for the month-long stay of the galleys but some remained for a much longer period and established more intimate commercial ties with their Egyptian counterparts and learned Arabic. As a result, ever changing coalitions of merchants, typically involving long-term residents in Alexandria (Venetian patricians, *cittadini*, some non-Venetians), well-heeled investors in Venice usually with some first-hand experience of Alexandria, merchants sent from Venice with the galleys and lower level intermediaries (colonial Venetians, other Italians, Egyptian Jews) operated in Alexandria and Cairo.²⁰ The contribution of those coalitions to the Venetian community was double-edged. While they crucially bolstered trade by providing mediating services and insider knowledge thus facilitating communication between, say, customs inspector and the consul, they also undermined joint community action because they were in competition with one another. They, for instance,

19 Cf. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*; for Alexandria in general, see Labib, "Iskandariyya"; also (yet not replacing Labib's excellent survey), Leiser, "Alexandria (early period)" and Christ, "Collapse and Continuity: Alexandria".

20 See for example the coalition in which Angelo Michiel operated (Christ, "Beyond the Network"; idem, "Filippo di Malerbi", and idem, *Trading Conflicts*).

tended to undercut attempts to form a Venetian pepper demand monopoly that could set a maximum price. By forming close business ties with Egyptian partners, they entered into a relationship based on long-term mutual obligations, which reduced the Venetian communities' freedom of action.²¹

The earliest preserved Venetian privileges for trade in Egypt date from the beginning of the thirteenth century.²² The Egyptian sultans regularly renewed the privileges upon Venetian request.²³ The arrangements for the Venetians as emanating from the privileges are so advantageous that one must ask, to which extent they reflect a Venetian ideal rather than a reality. In fact, some practices like forced sales or taxes entered into the privileges only with a considerable lag if ever at all.²⁴ The stipulations in 1415 are not significantly different from the earlier or later ones. They focus on full protection by the sultan included exemption from the *ius naufragiis*, exemption from inheritance tax/confiscation of intestate estates, exemption from regular Islamic jurisdiction, and the right to directly appeal to the sultan. They also confirmed the Venetian right to make use of two *fondacos*, freedom of movement across the entire empire and exemption from discriminatory measures imposed on local Christians.²⁵

What perhaps mattered most to the Venetians were customs duties and other expenses. Yet the privileges mention them only marginally. In 1419, the officially stipulated tariff was of ten percent (de facto possibly lower), from which certain highly desired goods such as pelts or pearls were exempted, while gold and silver incurred a reduced tariff.²⁶ The *ushr*, i.e. the tithe of ten percent seemed to increasingly have been accepted as an appropriate tax rate even for foreigners from the *dār al-ḥarb*,²⁷ while the customs in the Fatimid

21 Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, pp. 224–228; cf. Chap. XIII.

22 Tafel/Thomas, *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig*, vol. II, pp. 185–193.

23 Thomas, *Diplomatarium venetolevantinum*, pars I; Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium venetolevantinum*, pars II; Pedani, “Gli ultimi accordi”, p. 54 seq.

24 On the practice of Veneto-Mamluk trade, Ashtor, *Levant Trade*; on the conservatism of the privileges and their programmatic nature, Christ, *King of the Two Seas*.

25 Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, Nr. 167, pp. 310 seqq. (1415), see also notes above. The exemption from being treated as a regular *dhimmī* would seem to be an advantage as it, for instance, meant that the *jizya* tax had not to be paid. On the other hand, however, the customs tariff on *dhimmīs* would (at least according to the consensus of Islamic lawyers) have been only five percent, see Heffening, *Das islamische Fremdenrecht*, 54 seq.

26 Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, Nr. 167, p. 311: *osere*=*ushr*, i.e. a levy of ten percent, which was normal in this period (Sopracasa, *Venezia e l'Egitto*, p. 269); for possibly different procedures on the ground (with a provisional levy of only four percent on regular merchandise and one percent on gold and silver), see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, p. 216.

27 Heffening, *Das islamische Fremdenrecht*, p. 55 seq. 129; Labib, *Handelsgeschichte*, p. 246.

and Ayyubid periods (909–1260) had been 20 or even 30 percent.²⁸ The privileges of 1238 indeed mention a *quartum*,²⁹ that is 25 percent, which the Venetians attempted to lower.³⁰ Francesco Balducci Pegolotti (fl. 1310–47), probably reflecting conditions in the 1320ies, notes a tariff of 20 percent.³¹ The privileges, however, do not state a percentage but only emphasize the continuity of old custom.³² It seems that only in 1344 a Venetian envoy finally succeeded to lower the tariff to ten percent.³³ Yet as we shall see more money was eventually supposed to flow to the Sultanate's leadership; not only to the sultan's treasury but to various receivers thus reflecting the Sultanate's system of *de facto* shared rule.

The sultans had always imposed other charges on the Venetians. Agents of the sultan, for instance, obtained a share of the pepper entering the Sultanate through the Red Sea.³⁴ The Venetians subsequently had to purchase this pepper at a fixed price set above the market price. They had to accept it before they could buy pepper on the open market. This amounted to an additional *de facto* tax charged to the Venetian community. This practice most likely dates back to the late fourteenth century, the reign of Barqūq (r. 1382–89; 1390–99), but was

28 Labīb equates customs generally with the *khums* i.e. fifth of twenty percent, Labīb, *Handelsgeschichte*, p. 240 *seq.* reporting taxes for *ħarbis* of up to thirty percent, cf. also Cahen, “Douanes et commerce”, p. 243 *seq.*

29 This interpretation is a conjecture: *quartum*, at least in the German medieval context, would mean a quarter of a set regular tax (for instance a quarter of the tithe to which the bishop is entitled), *Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch* (<https://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw-cgi/zeige?index=lemmata&term=Quart#Quart-2.0> accessed 05.04.2020), s.v. Quart (11). Yet the present context would suggest that indeed the Arabic-Islamic *khums* is meant.

30 *De hoc quod ipsi petierunt quod omnibus Veneti non abstolletur quartum, secundum quod fuit usum et morem. Unde precepimus ut dimittentur et non abstolletur* (Mas Latrie, *Traités de paix* (1872), Supplément/Appendice, p. 72, 11).

31 Pegolotti, *La pratica della mercatura*, xxi (dating), 72: *Di ciò che metti in Alessandria all'entrare paga di diritto 20 per centinaio, e all'uscire paga niente.*

32 Thomas, *Diplomatarium*, I, nr. 4, 7 cf. Sopracasa, *Venezia e l'Egitto*, p. 66.

33 *Ibid.*, 292, nr. 154, cap. 1; also: Mas Latrie, *Traités*, Supplément/Appendice, p. 89, 1x; Sopracasa, *Venezia e l'Egitto*, p. 267 *seq.*; Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p. 67 *seq.*; cf. *Venezia—Senato: Deliberazioni miste*, vol. 9 registro XXII (1344–1345), §§ 351 *seqq.*

34 The provenance of the sultan's pepper cannot be studied in detail here. The pepper was probably collected as a customs levy in kind upon transit through the Red Sea ports and/or Cairo (Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p. 283; Heyd, *Geschichte des Levantehandels*, II, p. 448; Wiet, “Les marchands d'épices”, p. 99), purchased by the sultan's agents in Jeddah or elsewhere or obtained as tribute from the Rasulids (Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, pp. 70–79; Vallet, *L'Arabie marchande*, pp. 635–649; Vallet, “Du système mercantile à l'ordre diplomatique”, [p. 8 of draft on academia.edu]).

not yet inscribed into the privileges at this time.³⁵ It was rooted in a practice of custom's staple right. This means the obligation to exhibit all imported goods in the customs area and to put it to sale on auction. The importer did not have to sell his goods to the highest bidder but could "outbid" them. Yet, consequently, he had to pay customs on the so established price.³⁶ This was a sensible way for the customs administration to establish the price for the merchandise and thus to monetarize customs due by taking *ad valorem*. Alternatives were to levy the due percentage in kind (which entailed logistically complicated unpacking, quality control and weighing/measuring procedures) or fixed lists of monetary customs tariffs per unit of merchandise (giving rise to the genre of the *tariffe* manual navigating such procedures).³⁷ In order to record these often controversial proceedings to establish the customs due, the Venetians had the right to have their own (Latin) scribe in the customs area.³⁸

More importantly, not only the sultan was entitled to receive payments but also local interests although this naturally is not the particular focus of the privileges. They only vaguely allude to local custom and established practice. They summarily stated that no other payments than those thus prescribed were licit. These payments included a multitude of other dues, which could not be clearly separated from service charges. Venetian *tariffe* manuals for Alexandria list these charges in detail for each type of merchandise. Among them figure two types of payment which archival sources show to be particularly contentious: the *manzaria* (also *tome*, Arabic *ṭuma*, i.e. food expenses) and the *cortesia*, lit. "politeness", as some sort of institutionalized tip. Both of these payments were not due to the fisc or another institutional treasury but to local actors whereby it remains ambiguous to which extent they were *ad personam* or *ad officium*.³⁹

The merchant selling/importing or acquiring/exporting paid their taxes individually. The purchase of sultan's pepper and related *cortesia* payments, however, required communal action and communal funds. The accrual and

35 Christ, *King of the Two Seas*; Ashtor, "Le monopole de Barsbay", p. 553 *seq.*; Vallet, *Arabie Marchande*, p. 644.

36 Mas Latrie, *Traité*, Supplément/Appendice, p. 74, II (1238) cap. 5: *mercimoniarum que incantantur in doana, quando finitur incantacio, si dominus vult dimittere in doana vel accipere supra se ad vendendum in civitate, habeat potestatem vendendi*, cf. p. 78, IV (1254), cap. 10.

37 Alessio Sopracasa shows in his most punctilious and diligently introduced edition that, in the late fifteenth century, the evaluation of the merchandise was a procedure separate from trading, although the customs administration remained also a market place, Sopracasa, *Venezia e l'Egitto*, pp. 271, 374 *seqq.*

38 Mas Latrie, *Traité*, Supplément/Appendice, p. 75, II (1238), cap. 22.

39 Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, pp. 150–153; Sopracasa, *Venezia e l'Egitto*, p. 289 *seq.*

management of these funds necessitated a stable and permanent Venetian institutional presence and a Venetian fiscal system or treasury in Alexandria. These funds would also cover other expenses relating to Venetian trade in Alexandria, e.g. maintenance and running of the *fondacos*, the scribe at the customs, the notary etc.⁴⁰ The Venetian fiscal system was composed of two different funds alimented by different taxes. The *cottimo* alimented the communal fund and the *consolazio* the consular cash box.⁴¹ The extracts under investigation document the cash-flow in these funds.

The Venetian fiscal system in Alexandria was institutionalized only gradually. While the privileges from the early thirteenth century seem to indicate that the consular office was either not permanent or, more likely, that the consuls were not regularly residing in Alexandria for the whole year,⁴² the Venetian Senate stipulated that the consul should stay for two years in Alexandria in 1271.⁴³ From the year 1284 survive the instructions to such a resident consul.⁴⁴ In 1302, the privileges summarily noted that the Venetian consul could officiate according to established legal custom (*consuli Veneciarum fiant consuetudines*).⁴⁵ Although interrupted by a resurgence of crusading fervour from 1309 until 1344 and again, briefly, from 1367 to 1372, the institutionalized Venetian presence embodied by the consul essentially became permanent.⁴⁶

The sultan provided part of the consul's income. The accounts under investigation evidence that this payment, the *zemechia* (clearly meaning *jāmakiyya*, i.e. a stipend for a *mamlūk*), was not paid in cash but deduced from the payments due to the sultan. As such a deduction, the contribution dates back to the origins of the permanent consular office in the mid-thirteenth century.⁴⁷ It

40 According to the privileges the Mamluk authorities maintained the *fondaco*, but in practice this was (at least sometimes) not the case, Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, p. 72.

41 Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, pp. 77–88.

42 Mas Latrie, *Traité*s, Supplément/Appendice, p. 74, II (1238), cap. 8, *et si ibi non fuisset consul*, cf. p. 78, IV (1254), cap. 14, cf. cap. 20.

43 Jacoby, "Les Italiens en Egypte", p. 83.

44 Jacoby, "Le consulat vénitien d'Alexandrie".

45 Thomas, *Diplomatarium*, nr. 4, p. 6, cap. 7.

46 Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p. 551 *seq.*, Christ, "Kreuzzug und Seeherrschaft"; id., "Non ad caudam".

47 Mas Latrie, *Traité*s, Supplément/Appendice, p.79, IV (1254) first as the right to import freely (for the value of?) 2000 bezants: *Consulem: ipse sit francus de bizanciis mille annuatim*. Assuming a tariff of twenty percent this would amount to 400 bezants. If we interpret it more restrictively as the right to import gold freely it would amount to less as gold was paying a lower tariff (at the beginning of the fourteenth c.) of four percent according to a decision of the Venetian senate published in Sopracasa, *Venezia e l'Egitto*, p. 268; cf. Thomas, *Diplomatarium*, I, p. 6 (1302), p. 294 (1345); II, p. 170 (Damascus 1375: *el consolo di Veniciani diebia aver al anno bisanti duxento d'oro, i qual se intenda de le marchadantie che li*

first appears under the name *zemechia* in the privileges granted by sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh (r. 1412–1421) shortly before the drafting of our accounts in 1415.⁴⁸ This seems to be in line with the trajectory on which the Persian term *jāmakīyya* enters through the Seljuq realm (where it meant remuneration in cloth) to the Cairo Sultanate. There it first meant the salary of a *mamlūk* in a clerical function by the beginning of the fourteenth century. By the end of the fourteenth century, it meant a monthly, monetary stipend granted by the sultan to his personal *mamlūks*.⁴⁹ This money was paid by the *ustādār* or another high official, later even in the presence of the sultan, in the citadel.⁵⁰ Yet while the *mamlūks* received around 80 dinars a year, the Venetian consul could claim first a thousand and later, probably since 1365, still two hundred dinars.⁵¹

The Venetian custom system and in particular the *zemechia* payment reflect the close integration of the Venetian community (and by extension Venice) into the Sultanate as a very generously privileged *dhimma* community. The consul is thereby quasi conceived as a sultanic official as evidenced by the *zemechia* payment.⁵² The following section will analyze the accounts documenting the financial underpinnings of this arrangement and explore how they shed light on the relations between the sultan and the Venetians.

3 Sultan's and Customs Inspector's Accounts

Turning to our main source, we note that although the four extracts from the consul's accounts vary considerably in detail, they match as far as the essentials of the transactions (corresponding accounts, actors, and amounts) are concerned. They are kept among the papers of the Venetian consul in Alexandria, Biagio Dolfin d. 1420, in the archives of the *Procuratori di San Marco*, in the State Archives of Venice.⁵³ They are all written on the commonly used

marchadanti porta a, Damasco; zoè al dretto che li paga, et cossì commanda messer lo Soldam).

48 Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, II, p. 313 (1415: *che quelli habia prouision over zimichia dala doana*); cf. p. 325 (1422: *zemechia da la doana*).

49 Monés, "Djāmakīyya".

50 Ayalon, "The System of Payment", pp. 50–56.

51 Ibid., p. 55, for the amounts owed to the consul see the account in the appendix.

52 Cf. Christ, "The Venetian Consul"; also in Latin early modern Europe a permanent resident was perceived as a sign of a close union between the sending and receiving states (Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, pp. 95, 154).

53 How did the accounts end up among Biagio Dolfin's private papers? The copies must have been given back to the consular archive by the Venetian officials copying them after the aborted mission to the sultan (see below). Lorenzo Dolfin, nephew and heir of Biagio,

imported paper (produced by a mill in the Veneto) of roughly A3 (double-folio) format. In some cases, only a half sheet is used. The documents are written with ink in a Venetian late-gothic half-cursive or *mercantesca*, whereby readability and conventions (abbreviations, Latin or Arabic numbers) vary considerably.⁵⁴ The papers are slightly damaged by damp stains but are readable with the help of an ultra-violet Wood lamp. For the purpose of this analysis, I use the copy by Polo Michiel as the principal reference and refer to the other copies for clarification.⁵⁵

The account is part of a system of double-entry venture accounting (book-keeping) evidenced by the regular references to other pages of the ledger containing personal, expense and real accounts.⁵⁶ The left-hand column lists debits: *die dar* and the right-hand column credits: *die aver*. The copies contain extracts from three different but corresponding personal accounts: no. 45 of the sultan and nos. 96, 111 of the customs inspector in Alexandria.⁵⁷ The account extracts run over two pages of the same (double-)folio.

The first account (no. 45 of the consular ledger) starts with the consul debiting himself with the *zemechia*. On the credit side the sultan's alleged debt of 200 bezants, here equivalent to 200 dinars, is matched only by two payments by the customs inspector to the consul via the Venetian dragoman Obed of 50 and 58 dinars respectively. The account is not balanced as it was still an active account at the time the copies were drafted.

The next account (extracted from no. 96 of the consular ledger), although formally the customs inspector's account, in fact records transactions with all three representatives of the sultan in Alexandria, who were involved in the handling of the sultan's pepper: the so-called *chadi nadro della doana*, the customs inspector (*nāzir*=inspector), dispatched and controlled by the *nāzir* of the *dīwān al-khāṣṣ* (the sultan's demesne or personal treasury); the *amīr* (governor) of Alexandria reporting arrival of ships and probably also an estimate of

returned to Venice shortly after his uncle's untimely death. He must have taken with him all papers of his uncle he could put his hands on without being able or willing to separate private from official documents. It was all evidence against the many (some rather obviously fraudulent) claims on Biagio's estate. Originally, the papers of Biagio Dolfin were part of the archive of Lorenzo Dolfin and re-classified as a separate estate/archival entity only in the 20th century, cf. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, pp. 6–13.

54 The most hastily drawn copy is by Carlo Contarini, see Appendix 1; on the further career of Carlo Contarini as vice-consul upon Biagio Dolfin's departure to and subsequent death in Cairo see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, pp. 223, 231 seq., 277–279.

55 See Appendix 1, below; variants are indicated in footnotes; see below notes 64 seq. for the identity of the four merchants, who produced copies.

56 Lane, "Venture Accounting"; also Melis, *Storia della ragioneria*, 439 seq.

57 See Appendix 1.

the cargoes; and the sultan's merchant delivering the sultan's pepper.⁵⁸ In all but Carlo Contarini's copies, this account is struck out and in all four copies the balance is drawn and carried forward to the verso, which is the continuation of the customs inspector's account (no. 111 in the consular ledger). As in the case of the sultan's account (no. 45), this also is stylized as a personal account debiting received money and crediting given money (i.e., in this case, incurred fiscal obligations). The payments received by the customs inspector are listed on the debit side. They include 600 ducats from the consular cash box (*chassa de conto*),⁵⁹ minor payments by another Venetian merchant and a more substantial payment valuing 680 Bezants by the consul through his nephew (i.e. not accredited to the consular cash box but to Lorenzo Dolfin's personal account). The credit side lists the monetary equivalents of the "services" to be rendered by the customs inspector. The first entry states rather bluntly: "*Chadi nadro [di doana] de aver che li fo promesso di darli s'el se portasse ben in [lo fato del] romper di la voxe del piper duc. 600 d'oro* (Customs inspector to be credited 600 ducats that were promised to be given to him if he behaved well in the breaking-up [concluding] of the pepper *voce* [auction of the sultan's pepper])".⁶⁰ The account goes on listing payments to the customs inspector which were all effected in the context of the forced purchase of sultan's pepper through an auction (*voze, voxie*) whereby it becomes clear that there were two auctions (which was unusual).

It is worth noting how these transactions relate to other accounts. The brokers' fees, which, apparently, were paid via the customs inspector, are debited to the brokerage account, apparently a separate fund, which had to be cleared by the merchants. A payment to the *amir* of Alexandria is classified as *cortesia* (courtesy), i.e. some sort of customary bribe/tax, and thus debited to the *cottimo*, the Venetian communal fund. A similar *cortesia* payment to the customs inspector in the context of the pepper auctions is also debited to the same fund.

The copies of the two accounts extracted from the consular ledger thus highlight not only the importance and considerable financial implications of absorbing the sultan's pepper but also how center and periphery were intertwined. The sultan has a separate account. Yet the extraction of his account together with that of the customs inspector and the dominating theme of auctioning the sultan's pepper clearly connect the two. The Venetians must have seen the sultan as ultimately responsible for the actions of the customs

58 Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, p. 236, in general Chap. XIII.

59 Usually called *conto di cassa* (Melis, *Storia della ragioneria*, p. 439).

60 See Appendix 1.

inspector. They probably planned to address the sultan as the supreme ruler whose foremost task was to “erect justice among mankind”⁶¹ to redress the balance of payments and thus re-establish justice. What had happened to necessitate this? What were the perceived injuries that occurred during the pepper auctions?

4 Future Trading, Punitive Pepper Auction and Venetian Appeal to the Sultan

It is clear that the accounts relate to the two auctions of sultan’s pepper forced onto the Venetian community. The customs inspector obviously played a crucial role in it. Looking for other documents of the same month, we find a deliberation taken by the Venetian community’s council, the Council of Twelve, on 7 January 1420, which is three days before the copies of the two accounts were produced. It was decided to send a delegation to Cairo in order to submit a formal complaint to the sultan regarding the above-mentioned two pepper auctions.⁶² Some Venetians obviously felt that the customs inspector had treated them unfairly and meant to use the excerpts from the consular ledger as evidence against him. The four merchants drafting the four copies were the highest-ranking members of this council; some sort of executive committee. Their names rank first in the list of attendees opening the deliberation, two of them (Angelo Michiel and Lorenzo Bembo) appear in other documents as *consiglieri* (councillors), i.e. heads of the council, and Carlo Contarini was the vice-consul, who had to replace the Venetian consul Biagio Dolfin while he was absent from Alexandria or in case he died in office.⁶³ Polo Michiel, another important merchant and possibly a relative of Angelo Michiel, was together with Lorenzo Bembo elected to accompany the consul on his trip to Cairo to submit the official complaint to the sultan.⁶⁴

61 *Suscitador de zustizia in la humana generation, acordador e mezador entro quelli che a torto e raxon*, privilege of 1415, Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, II, p. 306.

62 Decision of the Council of Twelve, about the prices for pepper, Alexandria, 7 January 1420. 07.01.1420, ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, Commissarie miste, b. 180, “Comissaria Biagio Dolfin”, fasc. III, f. 4.

63 *Ibid.* and Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, pp. 223, 231 seq., 277, 279.

64 Polo Michiel, rather than the naturally predestined councillor Angelo Michiel, was probably selected because the latter was too heavily involved in the future trading at the heart of the problem, which meant a conflict of interest, Decision of the Council of Twelve, Alexandria, 7 January 1420, ASVe, *Procuratori di San Marco*, Commissarie miste, “Comissaria Biagio Dolfin”, b. 180, fasc. III, f. [4], for A. Michiel’s future trading, see Christ, “Beyond the Network”.

What had happened to trigger two auctions (rather than the usual one auction) to distribute the imposed sultan's pepper? What triggered additional payments to the inspector? Over the summer of 1419, Venetian merchants had engaged in risky future deals regarding the expected amount of Indian pepper bound to arrive in Alexandria during the Nile flood in late summer and autumn. One of these deals involved a merchant of the sultan, who was tasked to deliver the sultan's pepper to the Venetians (and perhaps other merchant communities) in Alexandria. At the same time, the consul, buttressed by a solid majority of the Council of Twelve and thus, arguably, the Venetian community, forbade these speculative practices. He negotiated a very sensible price of 150 bezants per *sporta* for the sultan's pepper (market price: ca. 150–160) with the customs inspector, who was responsible for the processing of the respective payment to the sultan. This support, however, came at a hefty price as indicated in the accounts. As it turned out, the consul and his supporters were right in distrusting the high expectations of the future traders. The latter's anticipated pepper price of 200 bezants was much higher than the actual prices paid when the Venetian galleys arrived in Alexandria in October 1419. When the customs inspector learned of the future trades and the anticipated high price from the sultan's merchant (who was involved in the future trade himself) he felt cheated. The future price of 157 dinars contrasted sharply with the negotiated dumping price and thus undermined his position with respect to his superior in Cairo. He consequently raised the price for the sultan's pepper already processed (of the first auction) and imposed a second load of pepper at 170 bezants (second auction) to be distributed among the members of the Venetian community.⁶⁵

Although the consul worked out a solution with the customs inspector (and a sensible one as the consul argued emphatically in a long letter to the Senate),⁶⁶ some merchants felt hard done by and lobbied the senate in Venice as well as the Council of Twelve in Alexandria. Eventually this pressure forced the consul into a mission to Cairo in order to redress the locally negotiated solution. It is obvious that the customs inspector's account was essential in the planned appeal to the sultan. Why, however, was the sultan's account included? This account, as we have seen, regarded the *zemechia*, i.e. the regular stipend received by the consul as a nominal member of the Sultanate's system of government. The main reason for the inclusion is that the *zemechia* had to be

65 On this episode, *ibid.*, 229–249 (Chap. XIII).

66 *Ibid.*, Chap. XIII, letter in the appendix 317–327.

paid from the customs levied by the customs inspector.⁶⁷ It might have insinuated a further accusation; that the customs inspector pocketed the money due to the consul.

Furthermore, the *zemechia* featuring prominently at the head of the document reminded the reader of the distinguished rank of the consul; that he was part of the Sultanate's courtly taxonomy. It looks almost like some sort of ID, an entrance pass, to facilitate access to the sultan. The key elements connecting the two accounts were courtly payments. That is what *cortesia* originally meant and the *zemechia* would then appear as some more formalized form of a *cortesia* owed to the consul. Hence, the alleged non-payment of the *zemechia* (by the sultan through the customs inspector) contrasted with an alleged overpayment of *cortesia* (to the customs inspector and his men). This formed a powerful argument and the way of presentation as meticulously drafted accounts presented it with a captivatingly rational and transcultural touch of fiscal sophistication. For accounts were not only a Venetian feature and in line with the *Serenissima's* corporate identity and the tone of voice of a merchants' republic. They were also part of the administrative and courtly culture, of statesmanship, of an Islamic empire.⁶⁸ The minus of courtesy from the Sultanate's side further emphasized the surplus of the Venetians, who not only duly paid but over-paid their dues.

How the Venetian delegation to Cairo intended to deal with the trickier issue of the obvious Venetian attempt to dump the price of the sultan's pepper and the forward purchases/future speculations, which were at odds with not only Venetian regulations but also Islamic law, we probably will never know. We do know, however, that the appeal to the sultan, i.e. the attempt to overturn local arrangements by appealing to the imperial power, was unsuccessful. An epidemic was ravaging Egypt at the very time the delegation took off to Cairo, and while the consul died in Cairo, one of his main witnesses died in Alexandria.⁶⁹ The consul's official successor came late enough to eschew the obligation to renew his late predecessor's efforts. The particular circumstances in early 1420 might explain this: less pepper was available in Alexandria and thus more expensive due to political problems in Aden and harsh taxation in

67 This becomes clear from the context of the privileges of 1422, Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, II, p. 325, cap. XIV: *i consoli de Dimasco, che quelli habia provision over zemechia da la doana, segando la quantitate che ha el consolo d'Alexandria, e de questo si fa testimonianza le tariffe de le doane, et in questo tempo non vien resposo al dicto consolo de la zumechia* (sic).

68 Hinz, "Das Rechnungswesen"; cf. Labib, *Handelsgeschichte*, p. 235. Vallet, "La comptabilité d'État".

69 Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, p. 279; Christ, "Filippo di Malerbi".

Jeddah,⁷⁰ while the conflict between Venice and King Sigismund (r. 1387–1437)⁷¹ and war in France reduced demand and thus the urgency of addressing the situation in Alexandria.⁷²

Hence Venice and Cairo did not revise the locally brokered solution. The accounts nevertheless document that the regulatory framework of appeal propagated by the privileges was felt to be a possible if difficult option. Recourse to it was attempted although it ultimately failed.

5 Conclusions: Imperial Order and Local Arrangements

The Sultan's *zemechia* and the Venetian *cortesia* as two different yet similar types of payments are joined in the accounts under investigation to formulate a powerful complaint against one of the local Egyptian interlocutors of the Venetian community in Alexandria. The complaint is formulated in the dry common language of fiscal accounting. It is not arguing for a change of the status quo. It is not even accusing. It merely asks the supreme judge to support them and to redress the balance; to settle an account and thus to do justice.

The Venetian state's representative, the consul in Alexandria, was integrated into the Sultanate's taxonomy via nominal inclusion into the court through the *zemechia*. This inclusion is reflected on the diplomatic macro-level (privileges) by the diplomatic strategies deployed to include the Venetian doge and state into the Cairo Sultanate, including embassies, gift exchange, tribute payments and the narrative style of the safe conducts or commercial privileges.⁷³

The embassy, for which these accounts were drawn, did not manage to gain access to the sultan. Hence, we can only speculate what the sultan would have done. Probably not much, for we do know that a few years earlier, in the case of a similar grievance, the sultan made it very clear that he did not want to be directly involved in the nitty-gritty problems of trade in Alexandria. While he emphatically confirmed his basic commitment to protect the Venetians (*amān*), he relegated the resolution of the concrete issue to the governor of Alexandria.⁷⁴ The Venetians, essentially, had to come to terms with the local powers: the *amīr* and the customs inspector. The consul, therefore, received

70 Vallet, *Arabie Marchande*, p. 653 *seqq.*; Christ, "Beyond the Network", p. 40 (referring to the situation in summer 1419).

71 King of Hungary since 1387, king of the Romans 1411.

72 Christ, "Passagers clandestins?", p. 282; Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, p. 200.

73 Cf. Christ, "Masked Cooperation with the Infidel?"

74 Translation of a safe conduct of the Sultan to the Venetians, 9 April 1418, ASVe, *Procuratori di San Marco*, Commissarie miste, b. 180, fasc. 1X, f. [1].

local officials in the *fondaco* and administered regular *cortesia* payments.⁷⁵ And, in more or less flagrant violation of sultanal privileges and Venetian regulations alike, some merchants established special relations to Egyptian officers both locally and in Cairo. They established and maintained these ties through business relations and generous gifts (often of cloth thus perhaps echoing or even quoting the sultanic custom of bestowing honorary robes—and to which also the *zemechia*, in its original meaning, referred⁷⁶).

The resulting image is thus one of Veneto-Mamluk trade relations under a hybrid institutional framework, which was negotiated locally but in the shadow of imperial, sultanic privileges. The imperial order, as a system based on the delegation of power, recognized and buttressed local arrangements. Locally reached consensus, tested over time, could become customary and thus more or less explicitly protected by the privileges' tireless emphasis on established custom (e.g. in the 1415 privileges: *segondo che se contien in le uzanze e paxe antique*).⁷⁷ If such rules, however, were renegotiated and produced new rules, there was a window of opportunity during which one could challenge it as *bid'a* (novelty; a problem to orthodox Islamic law)⁷⁸ as the privileges clearly state: *non i sia innovà vsanza nuova* ("there should not be innovated [any] new custom [as in: customary law]").⁷⁹ The *cortesia* payments as such were perfectly legitimate. They were the necessary lubricant, a catalyzer to facilitate the finding of consensual solutions to new problems, to bridge the gap between established procedures and unforeseen or unregulated problems. Such solution could occur *ad hoc*, on a case-to-case basis, without further consequence. Solutions also could slowly become established as standard procedures and thus become legal custom. In the grey zone between the two, there was room to denounce a new solution and the connected payments as innovation- so in this particular case of future trade and the respective punitive action.

The accounts were copied precisely with the intention to explore this ambiguity and to launch an appeal to the sultan. An unsettled account of mutual courtesies was to be brought to the court, to the sultan as the ultimate judge. The juridical and perhaps more importantly social (feudal) framework within

75 Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, pp. 74, 237 for receiving of officials and appendix for *cortesia* payments.

76 On gifts of cloth to Mamluk officials, see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, p. 80: on honorary robes: Petry, "Robing Ceremonials in Late Mamluk Egypt"; Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, Stillmann, "Khil'a"; Walker, "Rethinking Mamluk Textiles"; Springberg-Hinsen, *Die Khil'a*; Diem, *Ehrendes Kleid und ehrendes Wort*.

77 Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, II, p. 312.

78 At-Turkumānī, ed. Labīb, *Kitāb al-Luma*; Labīb, "The Problem of the Bid'a".

79 Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, II, p. 310.

which trade was supposed to unfold was (although essentially localized on the micro-level) cast in and buttressed by the interconnected and complementary (sultanic) imperial and (Venetian) state regulations on the macro- and meso-levels, grounded in the integration of the Venetians, of Venice, into the sultan's and thus Islamic realm. The resulting regulatory framework served as a fall-back position. The imperial and stately shadow was powerful enough to influence and delimit arrangements shaped locally.

The accounts seem to illustrate a type, or, rather, phase of statehood, in which the government, that is here the sultan's personal treasury or fisc, vigorously attempted to assert direct control over the financial revenues of Alexandria and, hence, transit trade.⁸⁰ Such control, however, could only be achieved to a very limited extent as the strategy of doing so was based, and could only be based, on the principle of divide and rule. The sultan delegated power to and thus shared power with his subordinates, including the doge of Venice and the Venetian consul in Alexandria. This power sharing arrangement, de facto leading to a deployment of power to the local/micro-level, was brokered within the framework of (sultanic) imperial rule, officially asserting far-reaching imperial control, on the macro-level. The inclusion of Venice and the Venetian consul into the Sultanate's imperial order, although first and foremost symbolical, was far from being meaningless for the merchants operating on the ground. Accounts, carefully documenting *zemechia* and *cortesía* payments, connected the financial flows between Venetians and the sultan. They evidence how arrangements responding to the economic logic of supply and demand were brokered locally and horizontally between actors of similar status. Yet this happened in the shadow of an imperial realm emphasizing the vertical power differential and tributary contract between the "*Doxe glorioso, magnifico e de gran autorità*" (the glorious, magnificent Doge of great authority)" who submitted to the sultan, the "*spada del mondo e de la lè, (...) Alexandro de questo tempo, semenador de zustixia e de bontà*" (the sword of the world and the law, (...) Alexander of this time, sower of justice and goodness).⁸¹

80 This should not be interpreted as a transformation towards some sort of fiscal military state. Egypt has been a fiscal military state for a very long time. The only thing that perhaps changed was a stronger emphasis on customs dues to compensate for declined regular tax revenue, cf. Christ, *King of the Two Seas*.

81 Thomas/Predelli, *Diplomatarium*, II, p. 306.

Appendix 1: Document

This is the transcription of accounts settling claims between the Venetian community in Alexandria and the Sultan/customs inspector, copied from the consul's ledger by Polo Michiel (P.M.) on the morning of 10 January 1420, ASVE (Archivio di Stato, Venice), *Procuratori di San Marco, Commissarie miste*, "Commissaria Biagio Dolfin", b. 181, fasc. XXIII, int. n, f. [9]. It is an example of what Lane would call Venetian venture accounting.⁸²

The transcription used other copies of the same accounts mainly by Angelo Michiel (A.M.), b. 181, fasc. XXIII, int. n, f. [5], without systematically indicating minor variants in the other copies.⁸³ Variants are set in square brackets (mainly parts omitted by A.M.) or footnotes. The word or abbreviation preceding the number indicating the reference account is universally rendered as "c". for *conto*.⁸⁴ All Roman numerals are reported in Arabic numerals for convenience, although in the originals dates, most amounts in the textual entries, and cross-references to other accounts are reported in that form, while the sums on the right of each column are in Roman numerals.

While the payments are often effected in ducats and sometimes perhaps in silver currency, the money of account used is the (ideal) gold bezant, which is equal to the ideal or canonical dinar (but different from the real-existing coin called bezant minted at the same time in Byzantium), rather than the pound (*Lira* £) and subdivisions used in Venice. This might be inspired by the traditions of Islamic imperial fiscal accounting converting payments into gold dinars.⁸⁵ The bezant (here abbreviated throughout with bx.) is divided into 24 carats (k.) and each carat into 6 *parvoli* (p.). The (ideal) ducat (duc.) was technically of the same value but real-existing ducats mentioned in the accounts are worth slightly less (because of wear and tear but also clipping). Therefore, they were valued at a rate slightly lower than the ideal bezant/dinar in these accounts, at 22.125 k.

For a reconstruction of the part of the consul's accountancy covered here see, Appendix 2 below; for the diplomatic description of the document see above in the main text.

82 Lane, "Venture Accounting".

83 The copies by Carlo Contarini (C.C.: *ibid.*, b. 181, fasc. XXIII, int. n, f. [10]) and Lorenzo Bembo (L.B.: *ibid.*, b. 181, fasc. XXIII, int. n, f. [6]) are more difficult to decipher on account of their handwriting and damp stains but clearly converge with P.M.

84 'h' (P.M., L.B.: maybe as in *hoc* the same [ledger]), 'lo' (?) (C.C.), 'ct' (?) as in *conto*? (A.M.).

85 Hinz, "Rechnungswesen", p. 9.

Recto	c. 45 1418	c. 45 1418
<p>Soldan del Chairo de' dar che ho meso a so conto per la mia zemechia per lo primo ano del mio consolado^a che comenza a dì 7 hotuber del 1418 a raxon di bx. 200 per ano conplirà el dito ano a dì 6 hotubrio del 1419 meto^b posto io Blaxio Dolfin dover aver in c. 36</p>	<p>Soldan del Chairo de' aver a dì 24 fevrer che [H]obeit zudio nostro truzimano me duse contadi, i qual^c me manda el chadi nadro de doana per parte de la mia zemechia tra [in] duc. e bx. d'oro^d posto cassa^e di conto di dar in c. 34</p>	<p>bx. 200, k. o, p. o</p>
<p>[c. 96] 1419^g</p> <p>Chadi [nadro] de doana</p> <p>[contrascrito] deⁱ dar di 2 novembrio contadi scriti ch'io dè contadi a [H]obeit zudio nostro truzimano ch'el porta al dito cadì ducati 600 d'oro che val a charati 22 p. 3 el duc. posto cassa de conto de aver c. 81</p>	<p>[E] di 3 novembrio contadi i qual [con]duse^f [H]obeit zudio nostro truzimano duc. 64 d'oro che fo mancho bx. 2 k. 12 [/ 3] resta neti posto cassa de conto de dar in c. 96</p>	<p>bx. 568 k. 18, p. o</p>
<p>[c. 96] 1419^h</p> <p>Chadi nadro [di doana] de' aver che li fo promesso di darli s'el se portasse ben in [lo fato del] romper di la voxte del piper duc. 600 d'oro a k. 22 p. 3 per duc. posto [per] raxon de dano tocha [al] piper de la voxie <i>de dar</i></p>	<p>[c. 96] 1419^h</p> <p>Chadi nadro [di doana] de' aver che li fo promesso di darli s'el se portasse ben in [lo fato del] romper di la voxte del piper duc. 600 d'oro a k. 22 p. 3 per duc. posto [per] raxon de dano tocha [al] piper de la voxie <i>de dar</i></p>	<p>bx. 568 k. 18, p. o</p>
<p>E che ser Daniel Capello dixte aver de contadi i quali vene a tuor [H]obeit zudio nostro truzimano duc. 20 d'oro che val a k. 22/3 per duc. posto el dito Ser Daniel die aver in c. 73^k</p>	<p>E che l'à voiuto che li sia promesso la sanseria de le sporte 150 de piper della voxte posto sanseria^l tocha a i ma<r>cadanti di dar in c. 103</p>	<p>bx. 18 k. 23 p. o</p>

[E] di 7 novembrio contadi che tolse [H]obeit Zudio nostro truzimano per so <i>nome</i> ^m duc. 15 d'oro che val a k. 22/3 in chassa di conto in c. 101	bx. 14 k. 5 p. 1	E per raxon di cottimo xè perché l'armiraiò di Alexandria a voiùdo i se responsda la cortexia uxada che se da per la vegnuda di le galie posto raxion de cottimo de dar c. 95	bx. 150 k. o p. o
E per riportar la posta posto di el dito chadi de' aver in c. 111	bx. 321 k. 23 p. 3	Per [H]obeit zudio truzimano nostro xè che'l dito cadi me manda contadi per lo dito [H]obeit duc. cento d'oro me dusse Lorenzo mio nievo et io li <i>meta</i> ⁿ a conto di dito [H]obeit e vol <i>mo che io li meta</i> ^o a conto del dito cadi val in [H]obeit nostro truzimano de dar in c. 86	bx. 95 k. 16 p. o
Summa bx. 923 k. 22/o		Summa 923 k. 22 p. o	

Verso

1419

1419

Chadi nadro de doana contrascrito de' dar a dì 7 dezenber, ch'el volsse che io desse per lui et fo dì 5 novembrio a Lorenzo Dolfin mio nievo posto el dito de' aver in c. 86	bx. 680 k. o p. o	Chadi nadro de' aver per reportar la posta el de' dar in c. 96	bx. 321 k. 23/3
E che lo i fo promesso al ronper de la seconda voxie de dar per <i>zascuna</i> ^p sporta de piper <i>che nui compre-mo</i> ^o zoé mi consolo e i chavi de la voxie duc. 1 1/2 per sporta per sporte 150 meto a raxon de duc. 1 1/2 per sporta duc. 225 a k. 22/3 per duc. posti raxon de danno della voxie de dar in 97			
			b. 213 k. 6 p. 3

E che lli fo promesso al ronper de la dita seconda voxie
 da darli secondo chomo li fo dado l'ano *pasado*^r per
 cortexia per lo fato de duc. [delle galie]^s che fo duc. 220
 d'oro che val a k. 22/3 per duc. posto [in] raxon de
 cotimo de dar in 95 bx. 208 k.
 3/0

Che ser Polo Michiel promesse per lui posto ser Polo
 [Michiel] de dar in 74 bx. 50
 k. 0/0

E che'l vuol che mi chonsolo schuoda la sanser<ia> de le
 sporte 150 de piper de la seconda voxie da quey
 merca[da]nti che avè le dite sporte 150 de piper a
 raxion de una per cento che per valor
 de bx. 24000 meto *posto*^t semper tocha merchanti che
 avè el dito piper de la segunda voxie de' dar in c. 92 bx. 240 k.
 0/0

E per el bari da i gambelli che l'ha voiudo la cortexia che
 usa dar al tempo delle galie i sia promeso che duc. 70 che bx. 66
 val a k. 22 p.3 a dar posto cortexia del bari in 107 k. 8/2

+ 1.41.9 a di X zener e fo da maitina. Ad instanzia de miser Blaxio Dolfin
 consollo nostro in Alexandria, io Polo Michiel ho chopiado del libro del
 dito miser lo consollo presenti ser Lorenzo Bembo, ser Angnolo Michiel
 et ser Carlo Contarin¹⁴

- a *Variants*: consolledego, consoladego.
 b o *over m.*
 c Che.
 d *A.M.*: fra oro e duc. d'oro.
 e *Variants*: chasa, caxe, chassa.
 f *A.M.*: che duse.
 g *Section (down to summa) crossed out diagonally.*
 h *Section (down to summa) crossed out diagonally.*
 i *Variants die, devo >(sic, A.M.)*
 j *A.M.*: con tutto l'altro in 97.
 k *A.M.*: in Ser Daniel ditto in c. 73.
 l *A.M.*: comprado del Vorach [*recte*: Lorach, the sultan's merchant] a $\frac{1}{11}$ [?] per zo [*struck out*] suma.
 m *A.M.*: nomine.
 n *A.M.*: avea messy.
 o *A.M.*: i torna.
 p *A.M.*: ogni.
 q *A.M.*: fose compra'.
 r *A.M.*: passe.
 s *A.M.*
 t *A.M.*: in summa.
 u *A.M. adds*: in la decima in casa soa, al suo scriver.

Appendix 2: Partial Reconstruction of the Venetian Consul's Accountancy

We can distinguish two types of accounts possibly kept in two different ledgers, a ledger for personal accounts (debit receiver, credit giver) and real accounts (*chassa de conto*, normally called *conto di cassa*) and some sort of expense account. All amounts in bezants as above.

Personal accounts

Sultan (PA)

Dr [die dar]	Cr [die aver]
	50
200	58

Customs inspector (PA)

Dr [die dar]	Cr [die aver]
568.75	568.75
19	112.5
14.25	150
680	95.6
	213.25
	208.1
	50
	240
	66.3

Biagio Dolfin [Venetian consul] (PA)

Dr [die dar] Cr [die aver]

200

Obed [Venetian dragoman] (PA)

Dr [die dar] Cr [die aver]

95.6 95.6

Daniel Capello (PA)

Dr [die dar] Cr [die aver]

19

Polo Michiel (PA)

Dr [die dar] Cr [die aver]

50

Lorenzo Dolfin [nephew of B. Dolfin] (PA)

Dr [die dar] Cr [die aver]

680

Real account (RA)
Dr=incomes; Cr=expenses

Chassa de conto (RA) c. 81, 36, 101, 96...

Dr [die dar] Cr [die aver]

50	
58	568.75
95.6	14.25

'Nominal' accounts (NA)

These are not really nominal accounts in the strict English sense of the word but rather akin to expenses and income accounts according to the American accounting standard.

Pepper auction (NA) c. 81, 92, 97

Dr [expenses] Cr [incomes]

568.75	Here would figure the payments
213.25	from the merchants (booked via
240	the cash-box account)

Cottimo (NA) c. 95

Dr [expenses] Cr [income]

150
208

Cortesia de bari [compulsory (?) tip for some sort of petty local officials] (NA) c. 107

Dr [expenses]	Cr [income]
---------------	-------------

66.3

Sanseria [brokerage] (NA) c. 103

Dr [expenses]	Cr [income]
---------------	-------------

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